CAPTURES

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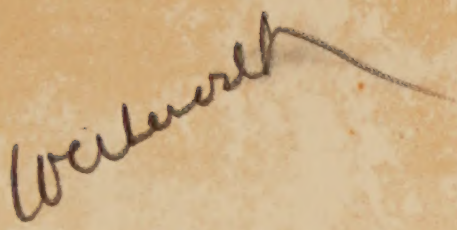

CAPTURES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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Captures

By

John Galsworthy

"Soft and fair, Gentlemen, never look for birds of this year in the nests of the last."—Don Quixote.

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TO

R. H. SAUTER

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CAPTURES

A FEUD

I

Its psychic origin, like that of most human loves and hates, was obscure, and yet, like most human hates and loves, had a definite point of physical departure—the moment when Bowden's yellow dog bit Steer's ungaitered leg. Even then it might not have 'got going' as they say, but for the village sense of justice which caused Steer to bring his gun next day and solemnly execute the dog. He was the third person the dog had bitten; and not even Bowden, who was fond of his whippet, could oppose the execution, but the shot left him with an obscure feeling of lost property, a vague sense of disloyalty to his dog. Steer was a Northerner, an Easterner, a man from a part called Lincolnshire, outlandish, like the Frisian cattle he mixed with the Devons on his farm—this, Bowden could not help feeling in the bottom of his soul, was what had moved his dog. Snip had not liked, any more than his master, that thin, spry, red-grey-bearded

chap's experimental ways of farming, his habit of always being an hour, a week, a month earlier than Bowden; had not liked his lean, dry activity, his thin legs, his east-wind air. Bowden knew that he would have shot Steer's dog if he himself had been the third person bitten by it; but then Steer's dog had *not* bitten Bowden, Bowden's dog *had* bitten Steer; and this seemed to Bowden to show that his dog knew what was what. While he was burying the poor brute he had muttered: "Damn the man! What did he want trapesin' about my yard in his Sunday breeks? Seein' what he could get, I suppose!" And with each shovel of earth he threw on the limp yellow body, a sticky resentment had oozed from his spirit and clung, undissolving, round the springs of its action.

To inter the dog properly was a long, hot job.

'He comes and shoots my dog, of a Sunday too, and leaves me to bury 'un,' he thought, wiping his round, well-coloured face; and he spat as if the ground in front of him were Steer.

When he had finished and rolled a big stone on to the little mound he went in, and, sitting down moodily in the kitchen, said:

"Girl, draw me a glass o' cider." Having drunk it, he looked up and added: "I've a-burried she up to Crossovers." The dog was male, a lissome

whippet unconnected with the business of the farm, and Bowden had called him 'she' from puppy-hood. The dark-haired, broad-faced, rather sullen-looking girl whom he addressed flushed, and her grey eyes widened. "'Twas a shame!" she muttered.

"Ah!" said Bowden.

Bowden farmed about a hundred acres of half and half sort of land, some good, some poor, just under the down. He was a widower, with a mother and an only son. A broad, easy man with a dark round head, a rosy face, and immense capacity for living in the moment. Looking at him you would have said not one in whom things would rankle. But then, to look at a West Countryman you would say so many things that have their lurking negations. He was a native of the natives; his family went back in the parish to times beyond the opening of the register; his ancestors had been churchwardens in remote days. His father, 'Daddy Bowden,' an easy-going handsome old fellow and a bit of a rip, had died at ninety. He himself was well over fifty, but had no grey hair as yet. He took life easily, and let his farm off lightly, keeping it nearly all to pasture, with a conservative grin (Bowden was a Liberal) at the outlandish efforts of his neighbour Steer (a Tory)

to grow wheat, bring in Frisian stock, and use new-fangled machines. Steer had originally come to that part of the country as a gentleman's bailiff, and this induced a sort of secret contempt in Bowden, whose forefathers in old days had farmed their own land here round about. Bowden's mother, eighty-eight years old, was a little pocket woman almost past speech, with dark bright eyes and innumerable wrinkles, who sat all day long in any warmth there was, conserving energy. His son Ned, a youth of twenty-four, bullet-headed like all the Bowdens, was of a lighter colour in hair and eyes; and at the moment of history, when Steer shot Bowden's dog, he was keeping company with Steer's niece, Molly Winch, who kept house for the confirmed bachelor that Steer was. The other member of Bowden's household, the girl Pansy, was an orphan, some said born under a rose, who came from the other side of the moor and earned fourteen pounds a year. She kept to herself, had dark fine hair, grey eyes, a pale broad face; 'broody' she was, given somewhat to the 'tantrums'; now she would look quite plain; then, when moved or excited, quite pretty. Hers was all the housework, and much of the poultry-feeding, wood-cutting and water-drawing. She was hard worked and often sullen because of it.

Having finished his cider, Bowden stood in the kitchen porch looking idly at a dance of gnats. The weather was fine, and the hay was in. It was one of those intervals between harvests which he was wont to take easy, and it would amuse him to think of his neighbour always 'puzzivantin'' over some 'improvement' or other. But it did not amuse him this evening. That chap was for ever trying to sneak ahead of his neighbours, and had gone and shot his dog! He caught sight of his son Ned, who had just milked the cows and was turning them down the lane. Now the lad would 'slick himself up' and go courting that niece of Steer's. The courtship seemed to Bowden suddenly unnatural. A cough made him conscious of the girl Pansy standing behind him with her sleeves rolled up.

"Butiful evenin'," he said, "gude for the corn." When Bowden indulged his sense of the æsthetic, he would, as it were, apologise with some comment that implied commercial benefit or loss; while Steer would pass on with only a dry 'Fine evenin'.' In talking with Steer one never lost consciousness of his keen 'on-the-make-ness,' as of a progressive individualist who has nothing to cover his nature from one's eyes. Bowden one might meet for weeks without realising that beneath his uncontradictious pleasantry was

a self-preservative individualism quite as stubborn. To the casual eye Steer was much more up-to-date and 'civilised'; to one looking deeper, Bowden had been 'civilised' much longer. He had grown protective covering in a softer climate or drawn it outward from an older strain of blood.

"The gnats are dancin'," he said, "fine weather"; and the girl Pansy nodded. Watching her turn the handle of the separator, he marked her glance straying down the yard to where Ned was shutting the lane gate. She was a likely-looking wench with her shapely browned arms and her black hair, fine as silk, which she kept brushing back from her eyes with her free hand. It gave him a kind of farmyard amusement to see those eyes of hers following his son about. 'She's Ned's if he wants her—young hussy!' he thought. 'Begad, but it would put Steer's nose out of joint properly if that girl got in front of his precious niece.' To say that this thought was father to a wish would too definitely express the circumambulatory mind of Bowden—a lazy and unprecise thinker; but it lurked and hovered when he took his ash-plant and browsed his way out of the yard to have a look at the young bull before supper. At the meadow of water-weed and pasture, where the young red bull was grazing, he stood leaning over

the gate, with the swallows flying high. The young bull was 'lukin' up bravely'—in another year he would lay over that bull of Steer's. Ah! he would that! And a dim savagery stirred in Bowden; then passed in the sensuous enjoyment—which a farmer never admits—at the scent, sight, sounds, of his fields in fine weather, at the blue above and the green beneath him, the gleam of that thread of water, half smothered in bulrushes, 'daggers,' and monkey flower, under the slowly sinking sun, at the song of a lark, and the murmuring in the ash-trees, at the glistening ruddy coat of the young bull and the sound of his cropping! Three rabbits ran into the hedge. So that fellow had shot his dog—his dog that had nipped up more rabbits out of corn than any dog he ever owned! He tapped his stick on the gate. The young bull raised a lazy head, gazed at his master, and, flicking his tail at the flies, resumed his pasturing.

'Shot my dog!' thought Bowden; 'shot my dog! Yu wait a bit!'

II

The girl Pansy turned the handle of the separator, and its whining drone mixed with the thoughts and feelings, poignant yet formless, of one who had little say in her own career. There was an ache

in her loins, for hay harvest was ever a hard week; and an ache in her heart, because she had no leisure, like Molly Winch and other girls, who could find time for the piano and to make their dresses. She touched her hard frieze skirt. She was sick of the ugly thing. And she hastened the separator. She had to feed the calves and set the supper before she could change into her Sunday frock and go to evening church—her one weekly festivity. Ned Bowden! Her fancy soared to the monstrous extravagance of herself and Ned walking across the fields to church together, singing out of one hymn-book; Ned who had given her a look when he passed just now as if he realised at last that she had been thinking of him for weeks. A dusky flush crept up in her pale cheeks. A girl must think of somebody—she wasn't old Mother Bowden, with her hands on her lap all day, in sunlight or fire-shine, content just to be warm! And she turned the handle with a sort of frenzy. Would the milk never finish running through? Ned never saw her in her frock—her frock sprigged with cornflowers; he went off too early to his courting, Sunday evenings. In this old skirt she looked so thick and muddy. And her arms—— Gazing despairingly at arms browned and roughened her fancy took another monstrous flight. She saw herself and Molly

Winch side by side ungarbed. Ah! She would make two of that Molly Winch! The thought at once pained and pleased her. It was genteel to be thin and elegant; and yet—instinct told her—strength and firmness of flesh had been desirable before ever gentility existed. She let the handle go, and, lifting the pail of 'waste,' hurried down with it to the dark byre, whence the young calves were thrusting their red muzzles. She pushed them back in turn—greedy little things—smacking their wet noses, scolding them. Ugh! How mucky it was in there—they ought to give that byre a good clean up! Banging down the empty pail, she ran to set out supper on the long deal table. In the last of the sunlight old Mother Bowden's bright eyes seemed to watch her inhumanly. She would never be done in time—never be done in time!

The beef, the cider, the cheese, the bread, the pickles—what else? Lettuce! Yes, and it wasn't washed, and Bowden loved his lettuce. But she couldn't wait—she couldn't! Perhaps he'd forget it—if she put some cream out! From the cool, dark dairy, down the little stone passage, she fetched the remains of the scalded cream.

"Watch the cat, Missis Bowden!" And she ran up the wriggling narrow stairs.

The room she slept in was like a ship's cabin—no bigger. She drew the curtain over the porthole-like window, tore off her things and flung them on the narrow bed. This was her weekly change. There was a hole in her undergarment, and she tore it wider in her hurry. 'I won't have time for a good wash,' she thought. Taking her one towel, she damped it, rubbed it over her, and began to dress furiously. The church bell had begun its dull, hard single chime. The little room was fiery hot, and beads of sweat stood on the girl's brow. Savagely she thought: 'Why can't I have time to be cool, like Molly Winch?' A large spider, a little way out from one corner of the ceiling, seemed watching her, and she shuddered. She couldn't bear spiders—great hairy things! But she had no time to stretch up her hand and kill it. Glancing through a chink left by the drawn curtain to see whether Ned had come down into the yard, she snatched up her powder puff—precious possession, nearest approach to gentility—and solemnly rubbed it over face and neck. She wouldn't shine, anyway! Under her Sunday hat, a broad-brimmed straw, trimmed with wide-eyed artificial daisies, she stood a moment contemplating her image in a mirror the size of her two hands. The scent of the powder, as of gone-off violets, soothed her nerves.

But why was her hair so fine that it wouldn't stay in place? And why black, instead of goldeny brown like Molly Winch's hair? Her lip drooped, her eyes looked wide and mournful in the glass. She snatched up her pair of dirty white cotton gloves, took her prayer-book, threw open the door, and stood listening. Dead silence in the house. Ned Bowden's room, his father's, his old grandmother's were up the other stairs. She would have liked him to see her coming down—like what the young men did in the magazines, looking up at the young ladies beautiful and cool, descending slowly. But would he look at her when he had his best on, going to Molly Winch? She went down the wriggling staircase. Gnats were still dancing outside the porch, ducks bathing and preening their feathers in sunlight which had lost all sting. She did not sit down for fear of being caught too obviously waiting, but stood changing from tired foot to foot, while the scent of powder mingled queerly with the homely odour of the farmyard and the lingering perfume of the hay stacked up close by. The bell stopped ringing. Should she wait? Perhaps he wasn't going to church at all; just going to sit with Molly Winch, or to walk in the lanes with her. Oh, no! That Molly Winch was too prim and proper; she wouldn't

miss church! And suddenly something stirred within the girl. What would *she* not miss for a walk in the lanes with Ned? It wasn't fair! Some people had everything! The sound of heavy boots from stair to stair came to her ears, and more swiftly than one would have thought natural to that firm body she sped through the yard and passed through the door in its high wall to the field path. Scarcely more than a rut, it was strewn with wisps of hay, for they had not yet raked this last field, and the air smelled very sweet. She dawdled, every sense throbbing, aware of his approach behind her, its measured dwelling on either foot which no Bowden could abandon, even when late for church. He ranged up; his hair was greased, his square figure stuffed handsome into board-like Sunday dittoes. His red face shone from soap, his grey eyes shone from surplus energy. From head to foot he was wonderful. Would he pass her or fall in alongside? He fell into step. The girl's heart thumped, her cheeks burned under the powder, so that the scent thereof was released. Young Bowden's arm, that felt like iron, bumped her own, and at the thrill which went through her she half-closed her eyes.

"I reckon we're tu late," he said.

Her widened eyes challenged his stare.

"Don't you want to see Molly Winch, then?"

"No, I don't want any words about that dog."

Quick to see her chance, the girl exclaimed:

"Ah! 'Twas a shame—it was, but she'd think more of her uncle's leg than of 'im, I know."

Again his arm pressed hers. He said: "Let's go down into the brake."

The bit of common land below the field was high with furze, where a few brown-gold blossoms were still clinging. A late cuckoo called shrilly from an ash-tree below. The breeze stirred a faint rustling out of the hedgerow trees. Young Bowden sat down among the knee-high bracken that smelled of sap and put his arm about her.

III

In parishes with scattered farms and no real village, gossip has not quite its proper wings; and the first intimation Steer had that his niece was being slighted came from Bowden himself. Steer was wont to drive the seven miles to market in a small spring cart filled with produce on the journey in, and with groceries on the journey out, holding his east-wind face, fixing his eyes on the ears of his mare. His niece sometimes sat beside him—

one of those girls whose china is a little too thin for farm life. She was educated, and played the piano. Steer was proud of her in spite of his low opinion of her father, who had died of consumption and left Steer's sister in poor circumstances. Molly Winch's face, indeed, had refinement; it coloured easily a faint rose pink, was pointed in the chin, had a slightly tip-tilted nose, and pretty truthful eyes—a nice face.

Steer's mare usually did the seven miles in just under forty minutes, and he was proud of her, especially when she overhauled Bowden's mare. The two spring carts travelled abreast of each other just long enough for these words to be exchanged:

"Mornin', Bowden!"

"Mornin'! Mornin', Miss Molly, 'aven't seen yu lately; thought yu were visitin'!"

"No, Mr. Bowden."

"Glad to see yu lukin' up s'well. Reckon Ned's tu busy elsewhere just now."

It was then that Steer's mare drew well ahead.

'My old mare's worth two of his,' he thought.

Bowden's cart was distant dust before he turned to his niece and said:

"What's the matter with Ned Bowden. When did you see him last?"

His shrewd light eyes noted her lips quivering, and the stain on her cheeks.

"It's—it's a month now."

"Is it—is it?" was all Steer said. But he flicked the mare sharply with his whip, thinking: 'What's this? Didn't like that fellow's face—was he makin' game of us?'

Steer was an abstemious man; a tot of sloe gin before he embarked for home was the extent of his usual potations at 'The Drake.' But that day he took two tots because of the grin on the face of Bowden, who would sit an hour and more after he had gone, absorbing gin and cider. Was that grin meant for him and for his niece?

A discreet man, too, he let a fortnight pass while he watched out. Ned Bowden did not come to church, nor was he seen at Steer's. Molly looked pale and peaky. And something deep stirred in Steer. 'If he don't mean to keep his word to her,' he thought, 'I'll have the law of him, young pup!'

People talked no more freely to Steer than he to them; and another week had passed before he had fresh evidence. It came after a parish meeting from the schoolmistress, a grey-haired, single lady, much respected.

"I don't like Molly looking so pale and daverdy,

Mr. Steer. I'm grieved about Ned Bowden, I thought he was a steady boy."

"What about him?"

"That girl at Bowden's."

Steer flopped into the depths of consciousness. So everybody round had known, maybe for weeks, that his niece was being jilted for that cross-bred slut; known, and been grinning up their sleeves, had they? And that evening he announced:

"I'm goin' round to Bowden's, Molly."

She coloured, then went pale.

"They shan't put it up on you," he said, "I'll see to that. Give me that ring of his—I may want it."

Molly Winch silently slipped off her amethyst engagement ring, and gave it him.

Steer put on his best hat, breeches and gaiters, took a thin stick, and set out.

Corn harvest was coming near, and he crossed a field of his own wheat into a field of Bowden's oats. Steer was the only farmer round about who grew wheat. Wheat! In Bowden's view it was all his politics! But Steer was thinking: 'My wheat's lookin' well—don't think much of these oats (another of his 'foreign expressions'; oats were 'corn' to Bowden). 'He'll have no straw.'

He had not been in Bowden's yard since the day

he executed the yellow whippet dog, and his calf twitched—the brute had given it a shrewd nip.

The girl Pansy opened the door to him. And, seeing the flush rise into her pale cheeks, he thought: 'If I were to lay my stick across your back you'd know it, my girl.'

Bowden had just finished his supper of bacon, beans and cider, and was smoking his pipe before the embers of a wood fire. He did not get up, and there seemed to Steer something studied and insulting in the way he nodded to a chair. He sat down with his stick across his knees, while the girl went quickly out.

"Butiful evenin'," said Bowden. "Fine weather for the corn. Drink o' cider?"

Steer shook his head. The cautious man was making sure of his surroundings before he opened fire. Old Mrs. Bowden sat in her chair by the hearth with her little old back turned to the room. Bowden's white-headed bobtail was stretched out with his chin on his paws; a yellow cat crouched, still as the Sphinx, with half-closed eyes; nothing else was alive, except the slow-ticking clock.

Steer held up the amethyst ring.

"See this?"

Undisturbed by meaning or emotion, Bowden's face was turned slowly towards the ring.

"Ah! What about it?"

"'Twas given to my niece for a purpose. Is that purpose goin' to be fulfilled?"

"Tidden for me to say. Ask Ned."

Steer closed his hand, slightly covered with reddish hairs.

"I've heard tales," he said. "And if he don' mean to keep his word I'll have the law of him. I've always thought my niece a sight too good for him; but if he thinks he can put a slight on her he's reckonin' without the cost—that's all."

Bowden blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Ned's a man grown."

"Do you abet him?"

Bowden turned his head lazily.

"Don't you come here bullyin' me." And again he puffed out a cloud of smoke. Its scent increased the resentment in Steer, who was no smoker.

"Like father, like son," he said. "We know what *your* father was like."

Bowden took his pipe from his mouth with a fist the size of a beefsteak.

"With the old lady settin' there! Get out o' my house!"

A wave of exasperated blood flooded Steer's thin cheeks.

"You know right well that she hears naught."

Bowden replaced his pipe. "'Tes no yuse tachin' yu manners," he muttered.

Something twitched in Steer's lean throat, where the reddish-grey hair covered his Adam's apple.

"I'll give your son a week; and then look out."

A chuckle pursued him to the door.

'All right!' he thought, 'we'll see who'll laugh last.'

IV

Difficult to say whether morality exists in a man like Bowden, whose blood is racy of the soil, and whose farmyard is so adjacent. That his son should run riot with the girl Pansy would have struck him more, perhaps, if Steer had not shot his dog—the affair so providentially put that fellow's nose out of joint. It went far, in fact, to assuage his outraged sense of property, and to dull the feeling that he had betrayed his dog by not actively opposing village justice. As for the 'Law,' the Bowdens had lived for too many generations in a parish where no constable was resident to have any real belief in its powers. He often broke the law himself in a quiet way—shooting stray pheasants and calling them pigeons; not inspecting his rabbit traps morning and evening;

not keeping quite to date in dipping his sheep, and so forth. The 'Law' could always be evaded. Besides, what law was Ned breaking? That was Steer's gup!

He was contemptuously surprised therefore when, three weeks later, Ned received a document headed 'High Courts of Justice. Winch *versus* Bowden.' It claimed five hundred pounds from him for breach of his promise of marriage. An outlandish trick, indeed—with the war on too! Couldn't Ned please himself as to what girl he'd take? Bowden was for putting it in the fire. But the more the two examined the document the more hypnotised they became. Lawyers were no use except to charge money—but, perhaps, a lawyer ought to have a look at it.

On market day, therefore, they took it to Applewhite of Applewhite and Carter, who subjected them to a prolonged catechism. Had Ned engaged himself to the girl? Well, yes, he supposed he had. How had he broken off the engagement—had he written to the girl? No. Well, had he received letters from her asking him what was the matter? Yes; two. Had he answered them? No. Had he seen the girl and done it by word of mouth? No. He had not seen the girl for ten weeks. Was he prepared to see the girl or write to her? He was

not. Was he ready to marry her? No. Why was that?

Ned looked at his father; and Bowden looked at Ned. The girl Pansy had never been mentioned between them.

Mr. Applewhite repeated his question. Ned did not know.

According to the lawyer, if Ned did not know, nobody knew. What had caused the change in his feelings?

It was Bowden who answered:

"He shot my dog."

"Who?"

"Steer."

Mr. Applewhite was unable to see the connection. If that was all, he was afraid young Mr. Bowden would either have to marry the girl or 'stand to be shot at' himself. And suddenly he looked at Ned. "Is there anything against this girl?" No, there was nothing against her.

"Then why not marry her?"

Again Ned shook his bullet head.

The lawyer smoothed his chin—he was a pleasant fellow, and a good fisherman.

"About this young lady, Miss Winch; excuse my asking, but I suppose you haven't been putting the cart before the horse?"

For the third time Ned shook his head.

No, there had been nothing of that sort. He did not add that if there had he might not have been overmastered by the propinquity of the girl Pansy.

"There's another girl in this, I suppose," said the lawyer suddenly; "well, I don't want to hear. It's for you to decide what you'll do—marry the girl or defend the action and get the damages reduced—it's a stiff claim. You and your father had better go away, talk it over again, and let me know. If you defend, you'll have to go up to London. In the box, least said is soonest mended. You'll simply say you found you were mistaken, and thought it more honourable to break off at once than to go on. That sometimes goes down rather well with juries, if the man looks straightforward."

The Bowdens went away. Steer passed them on the journey home. He was alone, driving that mare of his. The Bowdens grinned faintly as he went by. Then Bowden called out two words:

"Stickin' plaster!"

If Steer heard he gave no sign, but his ears looked very red.

When his hurrying cart was a speck at the top of the steep rise, Bowden turned a little towards his son.

"I want to make that chap sweat," he said.

"Ah!" answered Ned.

But how to make Steer sweat without sweating themselves? That was what exercised the Bowdens, each according to his lights and circumstances, which, of course, were very different. Even in this quandary they did not mention the girl Pansy. To do so would have been to touch on feeling; both felt it better to keep to facts and to devices. It was Bowden who put the finishing touch to a long and devious silence.

"If yu don' du nothin', Ned, I don' see how they can 'ave yu. Yu've not putt nothin' on paper. How'm they to tell yu don' mean to marry her? I'd let 'em stew in their own juice. Don't yu never admit it. Drop word to that lawyer chap that yu'm not guilty."

Ned nodded, but underneath his stolidity he could not help feeling that it was not so simple as all that. By him, though not yet quite tired of the girl Pansy, his first choice had begun to be faintly desired again—her refinement 'in the distance enchanted' was regaining some of its attraction to his cooling blood. What would have been the course of events but for Steer's next action is, indeed, uncertain.

V

In having the law of 'those two fellers,' Steer had passed through an experience with his niece which had considerably embittered feelings already acid. The girl had shown a 'ladylike' shrinking from pressing a man who had ceased to want her. There was an absolute difference between her wishes and her uncle's. He would not have young Bowden marry her for anything; he just wanted revenge on the Bowdens. She wanted young Bowden still; but if she couldn't get him, would cry quietly and leave it at that. The two points of view had been irreconcilable till Steer, taking the bit between his teeth, had assured his niece that to bring the action was the only way of dragging young Bowden back to her. This gave him a bad conscience, for he was fond of his niece, and he really felt that to bring the action would make that fellow Bowden stick his toes in all the more and refuse to budge. He thought always of Bowden and of the five hundred that would come out of *his* pocket, not out of Ned's.

Steer owned the local weed-sprayer, which, by village custom, was at the service of his neighbours in rotation. This year he fetched the sprayer back from Pethick's farm just as it was on the point

of going on to Bowden's without reason given. Bowden, who would not have been above using 'that chap's' sprayer so long as it came to him from Pethick in ordinary rotation, was above sending to Steer's for it. He took the action as a public proclamation of enmity, and in 'The Three Stars Inn,' where he went nearly every evening for a glass of cider with a drop of gin and a clove in it, he said out loud that Steer was a 'colley,' and Ned wouldn't be seen dead with that niece of his.

By those words, soon repeated far and wide, he committed his son just when Ned was cooling rapidly towards the girl Pansy, and beginning to think of going to church once more and seeing whether Molly wouldn't look at him again. After all, it was he, not his father, who would have to go into the witness-box; moreover, he had nothing against Molly Winch.

Now that the feud was openly recognised by village tongues, its origin was already lost. No one—hardly even the Bowdens—remembered that Bowden's dog had bitten Steer, and that Steer had shot it; so much spicier on the palate was Ned's aberration with the girl Pansy, and its questionable consequences. Corn harvest passed, and bracken harvest; the autumn gales, sweeping in from the Atlantic, spent their rain on the moor;

the birch-trees goldened and the beech-trees grew fox-red; and, save that Molly Winch was never seen, that Bowden and Steer passed each other as if they were stocks or stones, and for the interest taken in the girl Pansy's appearance by anyone who had a glimpse of her (not often now, for she was seldom out of the farmyard) the affair might have been considered at an end.

The breach of promise suit was never mentioned —Steer was too secretive and too deadly in earnest; the Bowdens too defiant of the law, and too anxious to forget it; by never mentioning it, even to each other, and by such occasional remarks as: "Reckon that chap's bit off more than he can chu," they consigned it to a future which to certain temperaments never exists until it is the present. They had, indeed, one or two legal reminders, and Ned had twice to see Mr. Applewhite on market days, but between all this and real apprehension was always the slow and stolid confidence that the 'Law' could be avoided if you 'sat tight and did nothin'.'

When, therefore, in late November Ned received a letter from the lawyer telling him to be at the High Courts of Justice in the Strand, London, at ten thirty in the morning on a certain day, prepared to give his evidence, a most peculiar change took

place in that bullet-headed youth. His appetite abandoned him; sweat stood on his brow at moments unconnected with honest toil. He gave the girl Pansy black looks; and sat with his prepared evidence before him, wiping the palms of his hands stealthily on his breeches. That, which he had never really thought would spring, was upon him after all, and panic, such as nothing physical could have caused in him, tweaked his nerves and paralysed his brain. But for his father he would never have come up to the scratch. Born before the halfpenny Press, and unable to ride a bicycle, unthreatened moreover by the witness-box, Bowden—after a long pipe—gave out his opinion that it "widden never du to let that chap 'ave it all his own way. There wasn't nothin' to it if Ned kept a stiff upper lip. 'Twid be an 'oliday-like in London for them both."

So, dressed in their darkest and most board-like tweeds, with black bowler hats, they drove in to catch the London train, with a small boy bobbing on a board behind them to drive the mare back home. Deep within each was a resentful conviction that this came of women; and they gave no thought to the feelings of the girl who was plaintiff in the suit, or of the girl who watched them drive out of the yard. While the train swiftly bore them, stolid

and red-faced, side by side, the feeling grew within them that to make a holiday of this would spite that chap Steer. He wanted to make them sweat; if they did not choose to sweat—it was one in the eye for him.

They put up at an hotel with a Devonshire name in Covent Garden, and in the evening visited a music-hall where was a show called the 'Rooshian ballet.' They sat a little forward with their hands on their thighs, their ruddy faces, expressionless as waxworks, directed towards the stage, whereon 'Les Sylphides' were floating white and ethereal. When the leading danseuse was held upside down, Bowden's mouth opened slightly. He was afterwards heard to say that she had 'got some legs on her.' Unable to obtain refreshment after the performance, owing to the war, they sought the large flasks in their bedroom, and slept, snoring soundly, as though to express even in their slumbers a contempt for the machinations of 'that chap.'

VI

Though sorely tried by the 'pernicketty' nature of his niece, Steer had been borne up by the thought that he had only to hold on a little longer to obtain justice. How he had got her to the

starting-post he really did not know, so pitiably had she 'jibbed.' The conviction that good solid damages would in the end be better for her than anything else had salved and soothed a conscience really affected by her nervous distress. Her pale face and reddened eyes on the way to the court disturbed him, and yet, he knew they were valuable —she was looking her best for the occasion! It would be all over—he told her—in an hour, and then she should go to the seaside—what did she say to Weston-super-Mare (with one syllable)? She said nothing, and he had entered the Law Courts with his arm through hers, and his upper lip very long. The sight of the two Bowdens seated on a bench in the corridor restored the burning in his heart. He marked his niece's eyes slide round as they passed young Bowden. Yes! She would take him even now! He saw Ned shuffle his feet and Bowden grin, and he hurried her on—not for anything would he forego the five hundred out of that fellow's pocket. At that moment the feud between him and his neighbour showed naked—those young people were but the catspaw of it. The custom of the court compelled them all presently to be sitting in a row, divided faction from faction by not more than the breadth of a pig. Steer's thin face, racked by effort to

follow the patter of the chap in a wig, acquired a sort of maniacal fixity; but he kept hold of his niece's arm, squeezing it half-consciously now and again, and aware of her shrinking faint look. As for 'those two fellers,' there they sat, like as at an auction, giving nothing away, as if they thought —darn them—that the case must fail if they sat tight and did nothing. It seemed unjust to Steer that they should seem unmoved while his niece was wilting beside him. When she went up, trembling, into the 'dock,' a strong scent of camphor floated from Steer, stirred from his clothes by the heat within him. He could hardly hear her, and they kept telling her to speak up. He saw tears roll down her cheeks; and the ginger in his greying hair and beard brightened while he glared at those Bowdens, who never moved. They didn't ask her much—not even Bowden's counsel—afraid to, he could see! And, vaguely, through his anger and discomfort, Steer felt that, with her 'ladylikeness,' her tears, her shrinking, she was making a good impression on judge and jury. It enraged him to see her made to shrink and weep, but it delighted him too.

She came back to his side and sat down all shrunk into herself. Bowden's counsel began outlining the defence, and Steer listened with his

mouth a little open—an outrageous defence—for what did it amount to but a confession that the feller had played fast and loose! His client—said counsel—came into court not to defend this action but to express his regret as an honourable man for having caused the plaintiff distress, though not, he would submit, any material damage; for, now that they had seen her in the box, it would be absurd to suppose that what was called her 'value in the marriage market' had deteriorated. His client had come there to tell them the simple truth that, finding his feelings towards the plaintiff changed, he had considered it more honourable, wise and merciful to renounce his engagement before it was too late, sooner than enter into a union from the start doomed to an unhappiness, which, the gentlemen of the jury must remember, would, in the nature of men and things, fall far more heavily on the plaintiff than on the defendant himself. Though fully admitting his responsibility for the mistake he had made and the hastiness of which he had been guilty, the defendant believed they would give him credit for his moral courage in stopping before it was too late, and saving the plaintiff from the fiasco of a miserable marriage . . .

At the words 'moral courage' Steer had righted himself in his seat so suddenly that the Judge was

seen to blink. 'Moral courage!' Wasn't anybody going to tell those dodos there that the feller had been playing the rip with that cross-bred slut? Wasn't anybody going to tell them that Bowden had put his son up to this to spite him—Steer? A sense of mystification and falsity muddled and enraged him; it was all bluff and blarney, like selling a horse. . . .

With the robust common-sense characteristic—counsel went on—of plain and honest men, the jury would realise that one could not have things both ways in this world—however it might be in the next. The sad records of the divorce court showed what was the outcome of hasty and ill-considered marriages. They gave one to think furiously, indeed, whether these actions for breach of promise, with their threat of publicity, were not responsible for much of the work of that dismal tribunal. He would submit that where you had, as here, a young man, admitting his error and regretting it, yet manly enough to face this ordeal in order to save the plaintiff, and in less degree himself, of course, from a life of misery, that young man was entitled if not to credit, at least to just and considerate treatment at the hands of his fellow-citizens, who had themselves all been young and perhaps not always as wise as Solomon. Let them remember what

young blood was—a sunny lane in that beautiful Western county, the scent of honeysuckle, a pretty girl—and then let them lay their hands on their hearts and say that they themselves might not have mistaken the emotions of a moment for a lifelong feeling.

"Don't let us be hypocrites, gentlemen, and pretend that we always carry out that to which in moments of midsummer madness we commit ourselves. My client will tell you quite simply, for he is a simple country youth, that he just made a mistake which no one regrets more than he, and then I shall leave it in your hands—confident that, sorry as we all are for the disappointment of this charming girl, you will assess the real values of the case with the instinct of shrewd and understanding men."

"Well, I'm darned!"

"H'sh! Silence in the court!"

The mutter which had been riven from Steer by counsel's closing words, by no means adequately expressed feelings which grew with every monosyllable from that 'young ruffian' answering the cunning questions of his advocate.

With his sleek, bullet head he looked sheepish enough, but the thing was being made so easy for him—that was what seemed villainous to Steer, that

and the sight of Bowden's face, unmoved, the breadth of two pigs away. When his own counsel began to cross-examine, Steer became conscious that he had made a hideous mistake. Why had he not caused his lawyer to drag in the girl Pansy? What on earth had he been about to let his natural secretiveness, his pride in his niece, prevent his using the weapon which would have alienated every sympathy from that young rascal. He tingled with disappointed anger. So the fellow was not to be shown up properly! It was outrageous. And then suddenly his ears pricked. "Now, young man," counsel was saying, "don't you think that in days like these you can serve your country better than by going about breaking girls' hearts? . . . Kindly answer that question! . . . Don't waste his lordship's time. Yes? Speak up, please!"

"I'm workin' the land—I'm growin' food for you to eat!"

"Indeed! The jury will draw their own conclusions as to what sort of leniency they can extend to a young man in your position."

And Steer's lips relaxed. That was a nasty one!

Then came the speeches from counsel on both sides, and everything was said over again, but Steer had lost interest; disappointment nagged at

him, as at a man who has meant to play a fine innings—and gets out for seven. Now the Judge was saying everything that everybody had said and a little more besides. The jury must not let themselves this, and let themselves that. Defendant's counsel had alluded to the divorce court—they must not allow any such consideration to weigh with them. While the law was what it was breach of promise actions must be decided on their merits. They would consider this, and they would consider that, and return a verdict, and give damages according to their consciences. And out the jury filed. Steer felt lonely while they were absent. On one side of him were those Bowdens whom he wanted to make sweat, on the other his niece whom, to judge from her face, he *had* made sweat. He was not a lover of animals, but a dog against his legs would have been a comfort during that long quarter of an hour, while those two enemies of his so stolidly stared before them. Then the jury came back, and the sentiment in his heart stuttered into a form he could have sent through the post: 'O Lord! make them sweat. Your humble servant, J. Steer.'

"We find for the plaintiff with damages three hundred pounds."

Three hundred! And costs—with costs it would come to five! And Bowden had no capital; he was

always on the edge of borrowing to get through—yes, it would push him hard! And grasping his niece's arm Steer rose and led her out by the right-hand door, while the Bowdens sought the left. In the corridor his lawyer came up. The fellow hadn't half done his job! And Steer was about to say so, when those two fellers passed, walking as though over turnips, and he heard Bowden say:

"Think he'll get that stickin' plaster—let 'im wait an' see!"

He was about to answer, when the lawyer laid hold of his lapel.

"Get your niece away, Mr. Steer; she's had enough." And without sense of conquest, with nothing but a dull irritable aching in his heart, Steer took her arm and walked her out of the precincts of the law.

VII

The news that New Bowden had 'joined up' reached the village simultaneously with the report that Steer had 'shot' him in London for three hundred pounds and costs for breaking his promise to Molly Winch. The double sensation was delicious. Honours seemed so easy that no one could see which had come off best. It was fairly

clear, however, that Molly Winch and the girl Pansy had come off worst. And there was great curiosity to see them. This was not found possible, for Molly Winch was at Weston-super-Mare and the girl Pansy invisible, even by those whose business took them to Bowden's yard. Bowden himself put in his customary appearance at 'The Three Stars,' where he said quite openly that Steer would never see a penny of that money; Steer his customary appearances at church, where he was a warden, and could naturally say nothing. Christmas passed, and the New Year wore on through colourless February and March, when every tree was bare, the bracken's russet had gone dark-dun, and the hedgerows were songless.

Steer's victory had lost him his niece; she had displayed invincible reluctance to return as a conquering heroine, and had gone into an office. Bowden's victory had lost him his son, whose training would soon be over now, and whose battalion was in Flanders. Neither of the neighbouring enemies showed by word or sign that they saw any connection between gain and loss; but the schoolmistress met them one afternoon at the end of March seated in their carts face to face in a lane so narrow that some compromise was essential to the passage of either. They had been

there without movement long enough for their mares to have begun grazing in the hedge on either hand. Bowden was sitting with folded arms and an expression as of his own bull on his face. Steer's teeth and eyes were bared very much like a dog's when it is going to bite.

The schoolmistress, who had courage, took hold of Bowden's mare and backed her.

"Now, Mr. Steer," she said, "pull in to your left, please. You can't stay here all day, blocking the lane for everybody."

Steer, who after all prized his reputation in the parish, jerked the reins and pulled in to the hedge. And the schoolmistress, without more ado, led Bowden's mare past, foot by foot. The wheels scraped, both carts jolted slightly; the two farmers' faces, so close together, moved no muscle, but when the carts had drawn clear, each, as if by agreement, expectorated to his right. The schoolmistress loosed the head of Bowden's mare and said:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, Mr. Bowden; you and Mr. Steer."

"How's that?" said Bowden.

"How's that indeed? Everybody knows the state of things between you. No good can come of it. In war-time too, when we ought all to be

united. Why can't you shake hands and be friends?"

Bowden laughed.

"Shake 'ands with that chap? I'd suner shake 'ands with a dead pig. Let 'im get my son back out o' the Army."

The schoolmistress looked up at him.

"And I hope you're going to look after that poor girl when her time comes," she said.

Bowden nodded.

"Never fear! I'd suner the child was hers than that niece of Steer's."

The schoolmistress was silent.

"Well," she said at last, "it's an unchristian state of mind."

"Yu go to Steer, ma'am, an' see whether he'll be more Christian-like. He 'olds the plate out Sundays."

This was precisely what the good lady did, more perhaps from curiosity than in proselytizing mood.

"What!" said Steer, who was installing a bee-hive; "when that God-darned feller put his son up to jilting my niece!"

"And you a Christian, Mr. Steer!"

"There's a limit to that, ma'am," said Steer dryly. "In my opinion, not even our Lord could

have put up with that feller. Don't you waste your breath trying to persuade me."

"Dear me!" murmured the schoolmistress. "I don't know which of you is worst."

The only people, in fact, who did know were Steer and Bowden, whose convictions about each other increased as the spring came in with song and leaf and sunshine, and there was no son to attend to the sowing and the calving, and no niece to make the best butter in the parish.

Towards the end of May, on a 'brave' day, when the wind was lively in the ash-trees and the buttercups bright gold, the girl Pansy had her hour; and on the following morning Bowden received this letter from his son.

"Dear Father,

"They don't let us tell where we are so all I can say is there's some crumps come over that stop at nothing and you could bury a waggon where they hit. The grub is nothing to complain of. Hope you have done well with calves. The green within sight of here wouldn't keep a rabbit alive half a day. The thing I wish to say is If I have a son by you know who—call it Edward, after you and me. It makes you think out here. She would like to hear perhaps that I will marry her if I come back so as not to have it on my mind. There is some German prisoners in our section—big fellows and proper swine with their machine-guns I can tell you. Hope you are well as this leaves me. Has that swine Steer given over asking

for his money? I would like to see the old farm again. Tell granma to keep warm. No more now from

"Your loving son
"NED."

After standing for some minutes by the weighing machine trying to make head or tail of his own sensations, Bowden took the letter up to the girl Pansy, lying beside her offspring in her narrow cabin of a room. In countrymen who never observe themselves, a letter or event which ploughs up fallow land of feeling, or blasts the rock of some prejudice, causes a prolonged mental stammer or hiatus. So Ned wanted to marry the girl if he came home! The Bowdens were an old family, the girl cross-bred. It wasn't fitting! And the news that Ned had it on his mind brought home to Bowden as never before the danger his son was in. With profound instinct he knew that compunction did not seriously visit those who felt life sure and strong within them; so that there was a kind of superstition in the way he took the letter up to the girl. After all, the child was as much bone of Ned's bone and of his own as if the girl had been married in church—a boy too. He gave it her with the words: "Here's a present for yu and Edward the seventh."

The village widow, accustomed to attend these

simple cases, stepped outside, and while the girl was reading, Bowden sat down on the low seat beneath the little window. The ceiling just touched his head if he remained standing. Her coarse nightgown fell back from her strong arms and neck, her hair showed black and lustreless on the coarse pillow; he could not see her face for the letter, but he heard her sigh. Somehow he felt sorry.

"Shid ought to du yu gude," he said.

Dropping the letter, so that her eyes met his, the girl spoke.

"Tisn' nothin' to me; Ned don't care for me no more."

Something inexpressibly cheerless in the tone of her voice, and uncannily searching in her dark gaze, disturbed Bowden.

"Cheer up!" he murmured; "yu'm got a monstrous baby there, all to yureself."

Going up to the bed, he clucked his tongue, and held his finger out to the baby. He did it softly and with a sort of native aptitude.

"He'm a proper little man." Then he took up the letter, for there 'wasn't,' he felt, 'no yuse in leavin' it there against Ned if an' in case he should change his mind when he came safe 'ome.' But as he went out he saw the girl Pansy put the baby to her breast, and again he felt that disturbance,

as of pity. With a nod to the village widow, who was sitting on an empty grocery box reading an old paper by the light coming through half a skylight, Bowden descended the twisting stairs to the kitchen. His mother was seated where the sunlight fell, her bright little dark eyes moving among their mass of wrinkles. Bowden stood a moment watching her.

"Well, Granny," he said, "yu'm a great-granny now."

The old lady nodded, mumbled her lips a little in a smile, and rubbed one hand on the other. Bowden experienced a shock.

"There ain't no sense in et all," he muttered to himself, without knowing too well what he meant.

VIII

Bowden did not attend when three weeks later the baby was christened Edward Bowden. He spent the June morning in his cart with a bull-calf, taking it to market. The cart did not run well, because the weight of the calf made it jerk and dip. Besides, though used to it all his life, he had never become quite case-hardened to separating calves from their mothers. Bowden had a queer feeling for cattle, more feeling indeed than he had for

human beings. He always sat sulky when there was a little red beast tied up and swaying there behind him. Somehow he felt for it, as if in some previous existence he might himself have been a red bull-calf.

Passing through a village someone called:

"'Eard the nus? They beat the Germans up proper yest'day mornin'."

Bowden nodded. News from the war was now nothing but a reminder of how that fellow Steer had deprived him of Ned's help and company. The war would be over some day, he supposed, but they didn't seem to get on with it, gaining ground one day and losing it the next, and all the time passing this law and that law interfering with the land. Didn't they know the land couldn't be interfered with—the cuckoos? Steer, of course, was all part of this interference with the land—the fellow grew wheat where anybody could have told him it couldn't be grown!

The day was hot, the road dusty, and that chap Steer hanging about the market like the colley he was—so that Bowden imbibed freely at 'The Drake' before making a start for home.

When he entered his kitchen the newly christened baby was lying in a grocery box, padded with a pillow and shawl, just out of the sunlight in which

old Mrs. Bowden sat moving her hands as if weaving a spell. Bowden's sheepdog had lodged its nose on the edge of the box, and was sniffing as if to ascertain the difference in the baby. In the background the girl Pansy moved on her varying business; she looked strong again, but pale still, and 'daverdy,' Bowden thought. He stood beside the box contemplating the 'monstrous' baby. It wasn't like Ned, nor anything, so far as he could see. It opened its large grey eyes while he stood there. That colley Steer would never have a grandchild, not even one born like this! The thought pleased him. He clucked to the baby with his tongue, and his sheepdog jealously thrust its head, with mass of brushed-back snowy hair, under his hand.

"Hullo!" said Bowden, "what's matter wi' yu?"

He went out presently, in the slanting sunlight, to look at some beasts he had on the rough ground below his fields, and the dog followed. Among the young bracken and the furze not yet in bloom again, he sat down on a stone. The afternoon was glorious beyond all words, now that the sun was low, and its glamour had motion, as it were, and flight across the ash-trees, the hawthorn, and the fern. One may-tree close beside him was still

freakishly in delicate flower, with a sweet and heavy scent; in the hedge the round cream-coloured heads of the elder-flower flashed, flat against the glistening air, while the rowans up the gulley were passing already from blossom towards the brown unrounded berries.

There was all the magic of transition from season to season, even in the song of the cuckoo, which flighted arrow-like to a thorn-tree up the rocky dingle, and started a shrill calling. Bowden counted his beasts, and marked the fine sheen on their red coats. He was drowsy from his hot day, from the cider he had drunk, and the hum of the flies in the fern. Unconsciously he enjoyed a deep and sensuous peace of warmth and beauty. Ned had said there was no green out there. It was unimaginable! No green—not the keep of a rabbit; not a curling young caterpillar-frond of fern; no green tree for a bird to light on! And Steer had sent him out there! Through his drowsiness that thought came flapping its black wings. Steer! Who had no son to fight, who was making money hand over fist. It seemed to Bowden that a malevolent fortune protected that stingy chap, who couldn't even take his glass.

There were little blue flowers, speedwell and milkwort, growing plentifully in the rough grass

around; Bowden noted, perhaps for the first time, those small flower luxuries of which Steer had deprived his son by sending him to where no grass grew.

He rose at length, retracing his slow-lifted tread up the lane, deep-soiled with the dried dung of his cows, where innumerable gnats danced level with the elder-blossom and the ash leaves. The village postman was leaving the yard when Bowden entered it. The man stopped in the doorway, and turned his bearded face and dark eyes blinking in the level sunlight.

"There's a talegram for yu, Mist Bowden," he said, and vanished.

"What's that?" said Bowden dully, and passed in under the porch.

The 'talegram' lay unopened on the kitchen table, and Bowden stared at it. Very few such missives had come his way, perhaps not half a dozen in his fifty odd years. He took it up, handling it rather as he might have handled a fowl that would peck, and broke it open with his thumb.

"Greatly regret inform you your son killed in action on seventh instant. War Office."

He read it through again and again, before he sat down heavily, dropping it on the table. His

round solid face looked still and blind, its mouth just a little open. The girl Pansy came up and stood beside him.

"Here!" he said, "read that."

The girl read it and put her hands up to her ears.

"That idn' no yuse," he said, with surprising quickness.

The girl's pale face crimsoned; she uttered a little wail and ran from the room.

In the whitewashed kitchen the only moving things were the clock's swinging pendulum and old Mrs. Bowden's restless eyes, close to the geranium on the window-sill, where the last of the sunlight fell before passing behind the house. Minute after minute ticked away before Bowden made a movement—his head bowed, his shoulders rounded, his knees apart. Then he got up.

"God for ever darn the blasted colley," he said slowly, gathering up the telegram. "Where's my stick?"

Lurching blindly he walked round the room, watched by the old woman's little dark bright eyes, and went out. He went at his unvaried gait on the path towards Steer's, slowly climbing the two stiles and emerging from the field into Steer's farmyard.

"Master in?" he said to the boy who stood by a cow byre.

"No."

"Where is 'e, then?"

"Not 'ome from Bickton yet."

"Oh! he idden! Gone in the trap, eh?"

"Ya-a-s."

And Bowden turned up into the lane. There was a dull buzzing in his ears, but his nostrils moved, savouring the evening scents of grass, of cow-dung, dried earth, and hedgerow weeds. His nose was alive, the rest within him all knotted into a sort of bitter tangle round his heart. The blood beat in his temples, and he dwelled heavily on foot and foot. Along this road Steer must come in his cart—God for ever darn him! Beyond his own top pasture he reached the inn abutting on the road. From the bench in there under the window he could see anyone who passed. The innkeeper and two labourers were all the company as yet. Bowden took his usual mug and sat down on the window-seat. He did not speak of his loss, and they did not seem to know of it. He just sat with his eyes on the road. Now and then he responded to some question, now and then got up and had his mug refilled. Someone came in; he noted the lowering of voices. They were looking at him. They knew.

But he sat on silent till the inn closed. It was still daylight when he lurched back up the road toward home, intent on not missing Steer. The sun had gone down; it was very still. He leaned against the wicket gate of his top field. Nobody passed. Twilight crept up. The moon rose. An owl began hooting. Behind him in the field from a group of beech-trees the shadows stole out ever so faint in the flowery grass, and darkened slowly as the moonlight brightened.

Bowden leaned his weight against the wood—one knee crooked and then the other—in dogged stupefaction. He had begun imagining things, but not very much. No grass, no trees, where his son had been killed, no birds, no animals; what could it be like—all murky grey in the moonlight—and Ned's face all grey! So he would never see Ned's face any more! That colley Steer—that colley Steer! His dead son would never see and hear and smell his home again. Vicarious home-sickness for this native soil and scent and sound—this nest of his fathers from time beyond measuring—swept over Bowden. He thought of the old time when his wife was alive and Ned was born. His wife—why! she had brought him six, and out of the lot he had only 'saved' Ned, and he was a twin. He remembered how he had told the doctor

that he wasn't to worry about the 'maiden' so long as he saved the boy. He had wanted the boy to come after him here; and now he was dead and dust! That colley Steer!

He heard the sound of wheels—a long way off, but coming steadily. Gripping his stick he stood up straight, staring down the road all barred with moonlight and the dusk. Closer came the rumble, the clop-clop of hoofs, till the shape of horse and cart came out of the darkness into a bright patch. Steer's right enough! Bowden opened his wicket gate and waited. The cart came slowly; Bowden saw that the mare was lame, and Steer was leading her. He lurched a yard out from the gate.

"'Ere," he said, "I want to speak to yu. Come in 'ere!"

The moonlight fell on Steer's thin bearded face.

"What's that?" he answered.

Bowden turned towards the gate.

"Hitch the mare up; I want to settle my account."

He saw Steer stand quite still as if debating, then pass the reins over the gate. His voice came sharp and firm:

"Have you got the money, then?"

"Ah!" said Bowden, and drew back under the

trees. He saw Steer coming cautiously—the colley—with a stick in his hand. He raised his own.

"That's for Ned," he said and struck with all his might.

The blow fell short a little; Steer staggered back, raising his stick.

He struck again, but the sticks clashed, and dropping his own, Bowden lurched at his enemy's throat. He had twice Steer's strength and bulk; half his lean quickness and sobriety. They swayed between the beech trunks, now in shadow, now in moonlight which made their faces livid, and showed the expression in their eyes, of men out to kill. They struggled chest against chest, striving to throw each other; with short hard gruntings. They reeled against a trunk, staggered and unclinched, and stood, breathing hard, glaring at each other. All those months of hatred looked out of their eyes, and their hands twitched convulsively. Suddenly Steer went on his knees and gripping Bowden's legs strained at them, till the heavy unsteady bulk pitched forward and fell over Steer's back with stunning weight. They rolled on the grass then, all mixed up, till they came apart, and sat facing each other, dazed—Bowden from the drink shaken up within him, Steer from the weight which had pitched upon his spine. They sat as if each knew there was no

hurry and they were there to finish this; watching each other, bent a little forward, their legs stuck out in the moonlight, their mouths open, breathing in hard gasps, ridiculous—to each other! And suddenly the church bell began to toll. Its measured sound at first reached only the surface of Bowden's muddled brain, dully devising the next attack; then slid into the chambers of his consciousness. Tolling? Tolling? For whom? His hands fell by his sides. Impulse and inhibition, action and superstition, revenge and mourning gripped each other and rolled about within him. A long minute passed. The bell tolled on. A whinny came from Steer's lame mare outside the gate. Suddenly Bowden staggered up, turned his back on his enemy, and, lurching in the moonlight, walked down the field for home. The clover among the wild grasses smelled sweet; he heard the sound of wheels—Steer had started again! Let him go! 'Twasn't no use—'twouldn' bring Ned back! He reached the yard door and stood leaning against it. Cold streaming moonlight filled the air, covered the fields; the pollarded aspens shivered above him; on the low rock-wall the striped roses were all strangely coloured; and a moth went by brushing his cheek.

Bowden lowered his head, as if butting at the beauty of the night. The bell had ceased to toll—

no sound now but the shiver of the aspens, and the murmur of a stream! 'Twas monstrous peaceful—surely!

And in Bowden something went out. He had not the heart to hate.

1921.

THE MAN WHO KEPT HIS FORM

In these days every landmark is like Alice's flamingo-croquet-mallet — when you refer to it, the creature curls up into an interrogation mark and looks into your face; and every cornerstone resembles her hedgehog-croquet-ball, which, just before you can use it, gets up and walks away. The old flavours of life are out of fashion, the old scents considered stale; 'gentleman' is a word to sneer at, and 'form' a sign of idiocy.

And yet there are families in the British Isles in which gentility has persisted for hundreds of years, and though you may think me old-fashioned and romantic, I am convinced that such gentlefolk often have a certain quality, a kind of inner pluck bred into them, which is not to be despised at all.

This is why I tell you my recollections of Miles Ruding.

My first sight of him—if a new boy may look at a monitor—was on my rather wretched second day at a Public School. The three other pups who occupied an attic with me had gone out, and I was ruefully considering whether I had a right to any wall-space on which to hang two small oleographs

depicting very scarlet horsemen on very bay horses, jumping very brown hedges, which my mother had bought me, thinking they might be suitable to the manly taste for which Public Schools are celebrated. I had taken them out of my playbox, together with the photographs of my parents and eldest sister, and spread them all on the window-seat. I was gazing at the little show lugubriously when the door was opened by a boy in 'tails.'

"Hallo!" he said. "You new?"

"Yes," I answered in a mouselike voice.

"I'm Ruding. Head of the House. You get an allowance of two bob weekly when it's not stopped. You'll see the fagging lists on the board. You don't get any fagging first fortnight. What's your name?"

"Bartlet."

"Oh, ah!" He examined a piece of paper in his hand. "You're one of mine. How are you getting on?"

"Pretty well."

"That's all right." He seemed about to withdraw, so I asked him hastily: "Please, am I allowed to hang these pictures?"

"Rather—any pictures you like. Let's look at them!" He came forward. When his eyes fell on the array, he said abruptly, "Oh, sorry!" and,

taking up the oleos, he turned his back on the photographs. A new boy is something of a psychologist, out of sheer fright, and when he said "Sorry!" because his eyes had fallen on the effigies of my people, I felt somehow that he couldn't be a beast. "You got these at Tomkins'," he said. "I had the same my first term. Not bad. I should put 'em up here."

While he was holding them to the wall I took a 'squint' at him. He seemed to me of a fabulous height—about five feet ten, I suppose; thin and bolt upright. He had a stick-up collar—'barmaids' had not yet come in—but not a very high one, and his neck was rather long. His hair was peculiar, dark and crisp, with a reddish tinge; and his dark-grey eyes were small and deep in, his cheekbones rather high, his cheeks thin and touched with freckles. His nose, chin, and cheekbones all seemed a little large for his face as yet. If I may put it so, there was a sort of unfinished finish about him. But he looked straight, and had a nice smile.

"Well, young Bartlet," he said handing me back the pictures, "buck up, and you'll be all right."

I put away my photographs, and hung the oleos. Ruding! The name was familiar. Among the marriages in my family pedigree, such as

'daughter of Fitzherbert,' 'daughter of Tastborough,' occurred the entry, 'daughter of Ruding,' some time before the Civil War. Daughter of Ruding! This demigod might be a far-off kinsman. But I felt I should never dare to tell him of the coincidence.

Miles Ruding was not brilliant, but pretty good at everything. He was not well dressed—you did not think of dress in connection with him either one way or the other. He was not exactly popular—being reserved, far from showy, and not rich—but he had no 'side,' and never either patronised or abused his juniors. He was not indulgent to himself or others, but he was very just; and, unlike many monitors, seemed to take no pleasure in 'whopping.' He never fell off in 'trials' at the end of a term, and was always playing as hard at the finish of a match as at the start. One would have said he had an exacting conscience, but he was certainly the last person to mention such a thing. He never showed his feelings, yet he never seemed trying to hide them, as I used always to be. He was greatly respected without seeming to care; an independent, self-dependent bird, who would have cut a greater dash if he hadn't been so, as it were, uncreative. In all those two years I only had one at all intimate talk with him, which after all was

perhaps above the average number, considering the difference in our ages. In my fifth term and Ruding's last but one, there had been some disciplinary rumpus in the house, which had hurt the dignity of the captain of the football 'torpid' eleven—a big Irish boy who played back and was the mainstay of the side. It happened on the eve of our first house match and the sensation may be imagined when this important person refused to play; physically and spiritually sore, he declared for the part of Achilles and withdrew to his tent. The house rocked with pro and con. My sympathies, in common with nearly all below the second fifth, lay with Donelly against the sixth form. His defection had left me captain of the side, so that the question whether we could play at all depended on me. If I declared a sympathetic strike, the rest would follow. That evening, after long hours of '*fronde*' with other rebellious spirits, I was alone and still in two minds, when Ruding came into my room. He leaned against the door, and said: "Well, Bartlet, *you're* not going to rat?"

"I—I don't think Donelly ought to have been—been whopped," I stammered.

"That's as may be," he said, "but the house comes first. You know that."

Torn between the loyalties, I was silent.

"Look here, young Bartlet," he said suddenly, "it'll be a disgrace to us all, and it hangs on you."

"All right," I said sulkily, "I'll play."

"Good chap!"

"But I don't think Donelly ought to have been whopped," I repeated inanely; "he's—he's too big."

Ruding approached till he looked right down on me in my old 'froust,' as we called arm-chairs. "One of these days," he said slowly, "you'll be head of the house yourself. You'll have to keep up the prestige of the sixth form. If you let great louts like Donelly cheek little weak six-formers with impunity," (I remember how impressed I was by the word) "you'll let the whole show down. My old governor runs a district in Bengal, about as big as Wales, entirely on prestige. He's often talked to me about it. I hate whopping anybody, but I'd much rather whop a lout like Donelly than I would a little new chap. He's a swine anyway for turning the house down because his back is sore!"

"It isn't that," I said, "it—it wasn't just."

"If it was unjust," said Ruding, with what seems to me now extraordinary patience, "then the whole system's wrong, and that's a pretty big question, young Bartlet. Anyway, it's not for me

to decide. I've got to administer what is. Shake hands, and do your damndest to-morrow, won't you?"

I put out my hand with a show of reluctance, though secretly won over.

We got an awful hiding, but I can still hear Ruding's voice yelling: "Well played, Bartlet! Well pla-a-ayed!"

I have only one other school recollection of Miles Ruding which lets any real light in on him. On the day he left for good I happened to travel up to town in the same carriage. He sat looking through the window back at the old hill, and I distinctly saw a tear run down his cheek. He must have been conscious that I had remarked the phenomenon, for he said suddenly:

"Damn! I've got a grit in my eye," and began to pull the eyelid down in a manner which did not deceive me in the least.

I then lost sight of him completely for several years. His people were not well off, and he did not go up to the 'Varsity. He once said to me: "My family's beastly old, and beastly poor."

It was during one of my Odysseys in connection with sport that I saw him again. He was growing fruit on a ranch in Vancouver Island. Nothing used to strike a young Englishman travelling in the

Colonies more than the difference between what he saw and what all printed matter led him to expect. When I ran across Ruding in the club at Victoria and he invited me to stay with him, I expected rows of fine trees with large pears and apples hanging on them, a Colonial house with a broad verandah, and Ruding in ducks, among rifles and fishing rods, and spirited horses. What I found was a bare new wooden house, not yet painted, in a clearing of the heavy forest. His fruit trees had only just been planted, and he would be lucky if he got a crop within three years. He wore, not white ducks, but blue jeans, and worked about twelve hours a day, felling timber and clearing fresh ground. He had one horse to ride and drive, and got off for a day's shooting or fishing about once a month. He had three Chinese boys working under him, and lived nearly as sparingly as they. He had been out of England eight years, and this was his second venture—the first in Southern California had failed after three years of drought. He would be all right for water here, he said; which seemed likely enough in a country whose rainfall is superior to that of England.

"How the devil do you stand the loneliness?" I said.

"Oh! one gets used to it. Besides, this isn't

lonely. Good Lord, no! You should see some places!"

Living this sort of life, he yet seemed exactly what he used to be—in fact, he had kept his form. He didn't precisely dress for dinner, but he washed. He had English papers sent out to him, and read Victorian poetry, and history natural and unnatural, in the evenings over his pipe. He shaved every day, had his cold tub every morning, and treated his Chinese boys just as he used to treat us new boys at school; so far as I could tell, they seemed to have for him much the feelings we used to have—a respect not amounting to fear, and a liking not quite rising to affection.

"I couldn't live here without a woman," I said one evening.

He sighed. "I don't want to mess myself up with anything short of a wife; and I couldn't ask a girl to marry me till the place is fit for her. This fruit-growing's always a gamble at first."

"You're an idealist," I said.

He seemed to shrink, and it occurred to me suddenly that if there were anything he hated, it would be a generalisation like that. But I was in a teasing mood.

"You're keeping up the prestige of the English gentleman."

His teeth gritted on his pipe-stem. "I'm dashed if I'm keeping up anything except my end; that's quite enough."

"And exactly the same thing," I murmured.

He turned away. I felt he was much annoyed with me for trying to introduce him to self-consciousness. And he was right! It's destructive; and his life held too many destructive elements—silence, solitude, distance from home, and this daily mixing with members of an Eastern race. I used to watch the faces of his Chinese boys—remote as cats, wonderfully carved, and old, and self-sufficient. I appreciate now how much of what was carved and old and self-sufficient Ruding needed in himself to live year in, year out, alone among them, without losing his form. All that week of my visit I looked with diabolical curiosity for some sign of deterioration—of the coarsening, or softening, which one felt ought naturally to come of such a life. Honestly, I could not find a trace, save that he wouldn't touch whisky, as if he were afraid of it, and shied away at any mention of women.

"Aren't you ever coming home?" I asked when I was taking leave.

"When I've made good here," he said, "I shall come back and marry."

"And then out again?"

"I expect so. I've got no money, you know."

Four years later I happened to see the following in *The Times:* "Ruding—Fuljambe.—At St. Thomas's, Market Harborough, Miles Ruding, of Bear Ranch, Vancouver Island, to Blanche, daughter of Charles Fuljambe, J.P., Market Harborough." So it seemed he *had* made good! But I wondered what 'daughter of Fuljambe' would make of it out there. Well, I came across Ruding and his wife that very summer at Eastbourne, where they were spending the butt end of their long honeymoon. She was pleasant, pretty, vivacious—too vivacious I felt when I thought of Bear Ranch; and Ruding himself, under the stimulus of his new venture, was as nearly creative as I ever saw him. We dined and bathed, played tennis and went riding on the Downs together. Daughter of Fuljambe was quite 'a sport'—though, indeed, in 1899 that word had hardly come into use. I confess to wondering why, exactly, she had married my friend, till she gave me the history of it one evening. It seems their families were old neighbours, and when Ruding came back after having been away in the New World for twelve years, he was something of a curiosity, if not of a hero. He had been used to take her out hunting when she was a small child, so that she had an old-time reverence for him. He seemed,

in his absence of small-talk and 'side,' superior to the rattle-pated young men about her—here daughter of Fuljambe gave me a sidelong glance—and one day he had done a thing which toppled her into his arms. She was to go to a fancy dress ball one evening as a Chinese lady. But in the morning a cat upset a bottle of ink over her dress and reduced it to ruin. What was to be done? All the elaborate mask of make-up and head-dressing, which she had rehearsed to such perfection, sacrificed for want of a dress to wear it with! Ruding left that scene of desolation possessed by his one great creative impulse. It seemed that he had in London a Chinese lady's dress which he had brought home with him from San Francisco. No trains from Market Harborough could possibly get him up to town and back in time, so he had promptly commandeered the only neighbouring motor-car, driven it at a rate which must have been fabulous in those days to a fast-train junction, got the dress, sent daughter of Fuljambe a wire, returned at the same furious pace, and appeared before her door with the dress at eight forty-five. Daughter of Fuljambe received him in her dressing-gown, with hair combed up and her face beautifully painted. Ruding said quietly: "Here you are; it's the genuine thing," and disappeared before she had

time to thank him. The dress was superior to the one the cat had spoiled. That night she accepted him. "Miles didn't properly propose to me," she said; "I saw he couldn't bear to, because of what he'd done, so I just had to tell him not to keep his form so awfully. And here we are! He *is* a dear, isn't he?"

In his dealings with her he certainly was, for she was a self-centred little person.

They went off to Vancouver Island in September. The following January I heard that he had joined a Yeomanry contingent and gone out to fight the Boers. He left his wife in England with her people on his way. I met her once or twice before he was invalided home with enteric. She told me that she had opposed his going, till she had found out that it was making him miserable. "And yet, you know," she said, "he's really frightfully devoted to me."

When he recovered they went back to Vancouver Island, where he found his ranch so let down that he had to begin nearly all over again. I can imagine what he went through with his dainty and exacting helpmate. She came home in 1904 to get over it, and again I met her out hunting.

"Miles is too good for me," she said the second day as we were jogging home; "he's got such

fearful pluck. If only he'd kick his conscience out of the window sometimes. Oh, Mr. Bartlet, I don't want to go back there, I really don't! It's simply deadly. But he says if he gives this up he'll be thirty-eight without a thing to show for it, and just have to cadge round for a job, and he won't do that; but I don't believe I can stand it much longer."

I wrote to Ruding. His answer was dry and inexpressive: Heaven forbid that he should drag his wife out to him again, but he would have to stick it there for another two years; then, perhaps, he could sell and buy a farm in England. To clear out now would be ruination. He missed his wife awfully, but one must hoe one's row, and he would rather she stayed with her people than force herself to rough it out there with him.

Then, of course, came that which a man like Ruding, with his loyalty and his sense of form, is the last to imagine possible. Daughter of Fuljambe met a young man in the Buffs or Greens or Blues, and after a struggle, no doubt—for she was not a bad little sort—went off with him. That happened early in 1906, just as he was beginning to see the end of his troubles with Bear Ranch. I felt very sorry for him, yet inclined to say: "My dear man, where was your imagination; couldn't you see this was

bound to happen with 'daughter of Fuljambe' once she got away from you?" And yet, poor devil, what could he have done?

He came home six thousand miles to give her a divorce. A ghoulish curiosity took me into court. I never had more whole-hearted admiration for Ruding than I had that day, watching him, in that pretentiously crooked court among us tight-lipped, curly-minded lawyers, giving his unemotional evidence. Straight, thin, lined and brown, with grey already in his peculiar-coloured hair, his voice low, his eyes unwavering, in all his lonely figure a sad, quiet protest—it was not I only who was moved by the little speech he made to the Judge: "My Lord, I would like to say that I have no bitter feelings; I think it was my fault for asking a woman to share a rough, lonely life, so far away." It gave me a queer pleasure to see the little bow the Judge made him, as if saying: 'Sir, as one gentleman to another.' I had meant to get hold of him after the case, but when it came to the point I felt it was the last thing he would want of anyone. He went straight back the six thousand miles and sold his ranch. Cunningham, who used to be in our house, and had a Government post in Esquimault, told me that Ruding made himself quite unpopular over that sale. Some enterprising gentleman, interested

in real estate, had reported the discovery of coal seams, which greatly enhanced the value of Bear Ranch and several neighbouring properties. Ruding was offered a big sum. He took it, and had already left the neighbourhood when the report about coal was duly disproved. Ruding at once offered to cancel the price, and take the agricultural value of the property. His offer was naturally accepted, and the disgust of other owners who had sold on the original report may be imagined. More wedded to the rights of property, they upheld the principle 'Caveat emptor,' and justified themselves by calling Ruding names. With his diminished proceeds he bought another ranch on the mainland.

How he spent the next eight years I only vaguely know. I don't think he came home at all. Cunningham spoke of him as 'Still the same steady-going chap, awfully respected; but no one knows him very well. He looks much as he did, except that he's gone grey.'

Then, like a bolt from hell, came the Great War. I can imagine Ruding almost glad. His imagination would not give him the big horror of the thing; he would see it as the inevitable struggle, the long-expected chance to show what he and his country were made of. And I must confess that on the evidence he seems to have been made of even better

stuff than his country. He began by dyeing his hair. By dint of this and by slurring the eight of his age so that it sounded like forty odd, he was accepted, and, owing to his Transvaal experience, given a commission in Kitchener's Army. But he did not get out to France till early in 1916. He was considered by his Colonel the best officer in the regiment for training recruits, and his hair, of course, had soon gone grey again. They said he chafed terribly at being kept at home. In the spring of 1916 he was mentioned in despatches, and that summer was badly gassed on the Somme. I went to see him in hospital. He had grown a little grey moustache, but otherwise seemed quite unchanged. I grasped at once that he was one of those whose nerve—no matter what happened to him—would see it through. One had the feeling that this would be so as a matter of course, that he himself had not envisaged any other possibility. He was so completely lost in the winning of the war, that his own sensations seemed to pass him by. He had become as much of a soldier as the best of those professionally unimaginative stoical creatures, and, quite naturally, as if it were in his blood. He dwelt quietly, without visible emotion, in that universal atmosphere of death. All was in the day's work, so long as the country emerged victorious; nor did

there seem the least doubt in his mind but that it would so emerge. A part of me went with him all the way, but a part of me stared at him in curiosity, surprise, admiration, and a sort of contempt, as at a creature too single-hearted and uncomplicated.

I saw him several times in that hospital at Teignmouth, where he recovered slowly.

One day I asked him point-blank whether one's nerve was not bound to go in time. He looked a little surprised and said rather coldly: "Not if your heart's in the right place."

That was it to a T. His heart was so deeply rooted in exactly the right place that nothing external could get at it. Whatever downed Ruding would have to blow him up bodily—there was no detaching his heart from the rest of him. And that's what I mean by an inbred quality, the inner pluck that you can bet on. I don't say it's not to be found in the proletariat and 'new' people, but not in quite the same—shall we say?—matter of course way. When those others have it, they're proud of it or conscious of it, or simply primitively virile and thick-skinned; they don't—like such as Ruding—regard not having it as 'impossible,' a sort of disgrace. If scientists could examine the nerves of men like him, would they discern a faint difference in their colour or texture—the result of

generations of nourishment above the average and of a traditional philosophy which for hundreds of years has held fear to be *the* cardinal offence? I wonder.

He went out again in 1917, and was out for the rest of the war. He did nothing very startling or brilliant; but, as at school, he was always on the ball, finishing as hard as when he started. At the Armistice he was a Lieutenant-Colonel, and a Major when he was gazetted out, at the age of fifty-three, with the various weaknesses which gas and a prolonged strain leave in a man of that age, but no pensionable disability. He went back to Vancouver. Anyone at all familiar with fruit-growing knows it for a pursuit demanding the most even and constant attention. When Ruding joined up he had perforce left his ranch in the first hands which came along; and at that time, with almost every rancher in like case, those hands were very poor substitutes for the hands of an owner. He went back to a property practically valueless. He was not in sufficient health to sit down for another long struggle to pull it round, as after the Boer War, so he sold it for a song and came home again, full of confidence that, with his record, he would get a job. He found that his case was that of thousands. They didn't want him back in the Army.

They were awfully sorry, but they didn't know what they could do for him. The Governmental education and employment schemes, too, seemed all for younger men. He sat down on the 'song' and the savings from his pay to wait for some ship or other out of his fleet of applications to come home. It did not come; his savings went. How did I know all this? I will tell you.

One night last January I had occasion to take a cab from a restaurant in Soho to my club in Pall Mall. It was wet, and I got in hastily. I was sitting there comatose from my good dinner when I had a queer feeling that I knew the back of the driver. It had—what shall I call it?—a refined look. The man's hair was grey; and I began trying to recollect the profile I had glimpsed when bolting in. Suddenly with a sort of horror the thought flashed through me: Miles Ruding!

It was!

When I got out and we looked each other in the face he smiled and my lips quivered. "Old chap," I said, "draw your cab up on that stand and get in with me."

When we were sitting together in his cab we lighted cigarettes and didn't speak for quite a minute, till I burst out:

"Look here! What does this mean?"

"Bread and butter."

"Good God! And this is what the country——"

"Bartlet," he said, through curiously set lips with a little fixed smile about the corners, "cut out all that about the country. I prefer this to any more cadging for a job; that's all."

Silent from shame, I broke out at last: "It's the limit! What about the Government schemes?"

"No go! All for younger men."

"My dear chap!" was the only thing I could find to say.

"This isn't a bad life in good weather," he went on with that queer smile; "I've still got gassy lungs."

"Do you mean to say you contemplate going on with this?"

"Till something turns up; but I'm no good at asking for things, Bartlet; I simply can't do it."

"What about your people?"

"Dead or broke."

"Come and stay with me till your ship comes home."

He squeezed my arm and shook his head. That's what's so queer about gentility! If only I could have established a blood tie! Ruding would have taken help or support from his kinsfolk—would have inherited without a qualm from a second

cousin that he'd never seen; but from the rest of the world it would be charity. Sitting in that cab of his, he told me, without bitterness, the tale which is that of hundreds since the war. Ruding could not be pitied to his face, it would have been impossible. And when he had finished I could only mutter:

"Well, I think it's damnable, considering what the country owes you."

He did not answer. Whatever his limitations Miles Ruding was bred to keep his form.

I nearly shook his hand off when I left him, and I could see that he disliked that excessive display of feeling. From my club doorway I saw him resume his driver's seat, the cigarette still between his lips, and the lamplight shining on his lean profile. Very still he sat—symbol of that lost cause, gentility.

1920.

A HEDONIST

Rupert K. Vaness remains freshly in my mind because he was so fine and large, and because he summed up in his person and behaviour a philosophy which, budding before the war, hibernated during that distressing epoch, and is now again in bloom.

He was a New Yorker addicted to Italy. One often puzzled over the composition of his blood. From his appearance it was rich; and his name fortified the conclusion. What the K. stood for, however, I never learned; the three possibilities were equally intriguing. Had he a strain of Highlander with Kenneth or Keith; a drop of German or Scandinavian with Kurt or Knut; a blend of Syrian or Armenian with Khalil or Kassim? The blue in his fine eyes seemed to preclude the last, but there was an encouraging curve in his nostrils and a raven gleam in his auburn hair, which, by the way, was beginning to grizzle and recede when I knew him. The flesh of his face, too, had sometimes a tired and pouchy appearance, and his tall body looked a trifle rebellious within his extremely

well-cut clothes—but, after all, he was fifty-five. You felt that Vaness was a philosopher, yet he never bored you with his views, and was content to let you grasp his moving principle gradually through watching what he ate, drank, smoked, wore, and how he encircled himself with the beautiful things and people of this life. Presumably he was rich, for one was never conscious of money in his presence. Life moved round him with a certain noiseless ease or stood still at a perfect temperature like the air in a conservatory round a choice blossom which a draught might shrivel.

This image of a flower in relation to Rupert K. Vaness pleases me because of that little incident in Magnolia Gardens, near Charleston, South Carolina.

Vaness was the sort of man of whom one could never say with safety whether he was revolving round a beautiful young woman or whether the beautiful young woman was revolving round him. His looks, his wealth, his taste, his reputation, invested him with a certain sun-like quality; but his age, the recession of his locks, and the advancement of his waist were beginning to dim his lustre; so that whether he was moth or candle was becoming a moot point. It was moot to me watching him and Miss Sabine Monroy at Charleston throughout

the month of March. The casual observer would have said that she was 'playing him up' as a young poet of my acquaintance puts it; but I was not casual. For me Vaness had the attraction of a theorem, and I was looking rather deeply into him and Miss Monroy. That girl had charm. She came, I think, from Baltimore, with a strain in her, they said, of old Southern Creole blood. Tall and what is known as willowy, with dark chestnut hair, very broad dark eyebrows, very soft quick eyes, and a pretty mouth—when she did not accentuate it too much with lip-salve—she had more sheer quiet vitality than any girl I ever saw. It was delightful to watch her dance, ride, play tennis. She laughed with her eyes; she talked with a savouring vivacity. She never seemed tired or bored. She was—in one hackneyed word—'attractive.' And Vaness, the connoisseur, was quite obviously attracted. With professional admirers of beauty who can tell whether they definitely design to add a pretty woman to their collection, or whether their dalliance is just matter of habit? But he stood and sat about her, he drove and rode, listened to music, and played cards with her; he did all but dance with her, and even at times trembled on the brink of that. And his eyes—those fine lustrous eyes of his—followed her about.

How she had remained unmarried at the age of twenty-six was a mystery till one reflected that with her power of enjoying life she could not yet have had the time. Her perfect physique was at full stretch for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four each day. Her sleep must have been like that of a baby. One figured her sinking into dreamless rest the moment her head touched pillow, and never stirring till she sprang up into her bath.

As I say, for me, Vaness, or rather his philosophy, *erat demonstrandum*. I was myself in some philosophic distress just then. The microbe of fatalism, already present in the brains of artists before the war, had been considerably enlarged by that depressing occurrence. Could a civilisation basing itself on the production of material advantages do anything but ensure the desire for more and more material advantages. Could it promote progress even of a material character except in countries whose resources were still much in excess of their populations? The war had seemed to me to show that mankind was too combative an animal ever to recognise that the good of all was the good of one. The coarse-fibred, pugnacious, and self-seeking would, I had become sure, always carry too many guns for the refined and kindly. In short, there was not enough altruism to go round—not

half, not a hundredth part enough. The simple heroism of mankind, disclosed or rather accentuated by the war, seemed to afford no hope—it was so exploitable by the rhinoceri and tigers of high life. The march of science appeared on the whole to be carrying us backward, and I deeply suspected that there had been ages when the populations of this earth, though less numerous and comfortable, had been proportionately more healthy than they were at present. As for religion, I had never had the least faith in Providence rewarding the pitiable by giving them a future life of bliss; the theory seemed to me illogical, for even more pitiable in this life appeared to me the thick-skinned and successful, and these, as we know in the saying about the camel and the needle's eye, are consigned wholesale to hell. Success, power, wealth—those aims of profiteers and premiers, pedagogues and pandemoniacs, of all, in fact, who could not see God in a dewdrop, hear Him in distant goat-bells, and scent Him in a pepper-tree—had always appeared to me akin to dry-rot. And yet every day one saw more distinctly that the holders of the 'power' philosophy were the hub of a universe which, with the approbation of the majority they represented, they were fast making uninhabitable. It did not even seem of any use to help one's neigh-

bours; all efforts at relief just gilded the pill and encouraged our stubbornly contentious leaders to plunge us all into fresh miseries. So I was searching right and left for something to believe in, willing to accept even Rupert K. Vaness and his basking philosophy. But, then, could a man bask his life right out? Could just looking at fine pictures, tasting rare fruits and wines, the mere listening to good music, the scent of azaleas and the best tobacco, above all the society of pretty women, keep salt in my bread, an ideal in my brain? Could they? That's what I wanted to know.

Everyone who goes to Charleston in the spring, soon or late, visits Magnolia Gardens. A painter of flowers and trees myself, I specialise in gardens, and freely assert that none in the world is so beautiful as this. Even before the magnolias come out it consigns the Boboli at Florence, the Cinnamon Gardens of Colombo, Concepcion at Malaga, Versailles, Hampton Court, the Generaliffe at Granada, and La Mortola to the category of 'also ran.' Nothing so free, gracious, so lovely and wistful, nothing so richly coloured, yet so ghostlike, exists planted by the sons of men. It is a kind of paradise which has wandered down, a miraculously enchanted wilderness. Brilliant with azaleas, or

magnolia-pale, it centres round a pool of water overhung by tall trunks festooned with the grey Florida moss. Beyond anything I have ever seen it is other-wordly. And I went there day after day, drawn as one is drawn in youth by visions of the Ionian Sea, of the East, or the Pacific Isles. I used to sit paralysed by the absurdity of putting brush to canvas in front of that dream-pool. I wanted to paint of it a picture like that of the fountain, by Helleu, which hangs in the Luxembourg. But I knew I never should.

I was sitting there one sunny afternoon with my back to a clump of azaleas watching an old coloured gardener—so old that he had started life as an 'owned' negro they said, and certainly still retained the familiar suavity of the oldtime darkie—I was watching him prune the shrubs when I heard the voice of Rupert K. Vaness say, quite close: "There's nothing for me but beauty, Miss Monroy."

The two were evidently just behind my azalea clump, perhaps four yards away, yet as invisible as if in China.

"Beauty is a wide, wide word. Define it, Mr. Vaness."

"An ounce of fact is worth a ton of theory—it stands before me."

"Come now, that's just a get-out. Is beauty of the flesh or of the spirit?"

"What is the spirit as you call it? I'm a Pagan."

"Oh! So am I. But the Greeks were Pagans."

"Well, spirit is only the refined side of sensual appreciations."

"I wonder!"

"I have spent my life in finding that out."

"Then, the feeling this garden rouses in me is purely sensuous?"

"Of course. If you were standing there blind and deaf, without the powers of scent and touch, where would your feeling be?"

"You are very discouraging, Mr. Vaness."

"No, madam—I face facts. When I was a youngster I had plenty of fluffy aspiration towards I didn't know what—I even used to write poetry."

"Oh! Mr. Vaness, was it good?"

"It was not, and I very soon learned that a genuine sensation was worth all the uplift in the world."

"What is going to happen when your senses strike work?"

"I shall sit in the sun and fade out."

"I certainly do like your frankness."

"You think me a cynic, of course; I am nothing

so futile, Miss Sabine. A cynic is just a posing ass proud of his attitude. I see nothing to be proud of in my attitude, just as I see nothing to be proud of in the truths of existence."

"Suppose you had been poor?"

"My senses would be lasting better than they are; and when they at last failed I should die quicker from want of food and warmth—that's all."

"Have you ever been in love, Mr. Vaness?"

"I am in love now."

"And your love has no element of devotion, no finer side?"

"None. It wants."

"I have never been in love. But, if I were, I think I should want to lose myself rather than to gain the other."

"Would you? Sabine, *I am in love with you.*"

"Oh! Shall we walk on?"

I heard their footsteps and was alone again, with the old gardener lopping at his shrubs.

But what a perfect declaration of hedonism; how simple and how solid was this Vaness theory of existence! Almost Assyrian—worthy of Louis Quinze!

And just then the old negro came up.

"It's pleasant settin'," he said in his polite and hoarse half whisper; "dar ain't no flies yet."

"It's perfect, Richard. This is the most beautiful spot in the world."

"Sure," he answered, softly drawling. "In de war time de Yanks nearly burn d'house heah. Sherman's Yanks. Sure dey did, po'ful angry wi' ole Massa dey was, 'cos he hid up d' silver plate afore he went away. My ole father was de factotalum den. De Yanks took'm, suh; dey took'm; and de major he tell my fader to show'm whar de plate was. My ole fader he look at'm an' say: 'Wot yuh take me foh? Yuh take me for a sneakin' nigger? No, suh, yuh do wot yuh like wid dis chile he ain't goin' to act no Judas. No, suh!' And de Yankee major he put'm up against dat tall live-oak dar, an' he say: 'Yu darn ungrateful nigger. I'se come all dis way to set yuh free. Now, whar's dat silver plate or I shoot yuh up, sure!' 'No, suh,' says my fader, 'shoot away. I'se never goin' t'tell.' So dey begin to shoot, and shot all roun'm to skeer'm up. I was a lil' boy den, an' I see my ole fader wid my own eyes, suh, standin' thar's bold's Peter. No, suh, dey didn't never get no word from him; he loved de folk heah; sure he did."

The old man smiled; and in that beatific smile I saw not only his perennial pleasure in the well-known story, but the fact that he too would have

stood there with the bullets raining round him sooner than betray the folk he loved.

"Fine story, Richard. But—very silly obstinate old man, your father, wasn't he?"

He looked at me with a sort of startled anger, which slowly broadened into a grin; then broke into soft hoarse laughter.

"Oh! yes, suh, sure! Berry silly obstinacious ole man. Yes, suh, indeed!" And he went off cackling to himself.

He had only just gone when I heard footsteps again behind my azalea clump and Miss Monroy's voice:

"Your philosophy is that of faun and nymph. But can you play the part?"

"Only let me try." Those words had such a fevered ring that in imagination I could see Vaness all flushed, his fine eyes shining, his well-kept hands trembling, his lips a little protruded.

There came a laugh, high, gay, sweet.

"Very well then; catch me!" I heard a swish of skirt against the shrubs, the sounds of flight; an astonished gasp from Vaness, and the heavy thud thud of his feet following on the path through the azalea maze. I hoped fervently that they would not suddenly come running past and see me sitting there. My straining ears caught another laugh far

off, a panting sound, a muttered oath, a far-away coo-ee! And then, staggering, winded, pale with heat and with vexation, Vaness appeared, caught sight of me and stood a moment—baff! Sweat was running down his face, his hand was clutching at his side, his stomach heaved—a hunter beaten and undignified. He muttered, turned abruptly on his heel, and left me staring at where his fastidious dandyism and all that it stood for had so abruptly come undone.

I know not how he and Miss Monroy got home to Charleston; not in the same car, I guess. As for me, I travelled deep in thought, conscious of having witnessed something rather tragic, not looking forward to my next encounter with Vaness.

He was not at dinner, but the girl was—radiant as ever; and though I was glad she had not been caught I was almost angry at the signal triumph of her youth. She wore a black dress with a red flower in her hair and another at her breast, and had never looked so vital and so pretty. Instead of dallying with my cigar beside cool waters in the lounge of the hotel I strolled out afterwards on the Battery and sat down beside the statue of a tutelary personage. A lovely evening: from some tree or shrub close by emerged an adorable faint fragrance, and in the white electric light the acacia

foliage was patterned out against a thrilling blue sky. If there were no fireflies abroad there should have been. A night for hedonists, indeed!

And suddenly there came before me two freaks of vision—Vaness's well-dressed person, panting, pale, perplexed; and beside him the old darkie's father, bound to the live-oak, with the bullets whistling past and his face transfigured. There they stood alongside—the creed of pleasure, which depended for fulfilment on its waist measurement; and the creed of love devoted unto death!

'Aha!' I thought, 'which of the two laughs *last?*'

And just then I saw Vaness himself beneath a lamp; cigar in mouth and cape flung back so that its silk lining shone. Pale and heavy, in the cruel white light, his face had a bitter look. And I was sorry—very sorry, at that moment, for Rupert K. Vaness.

1920.

TIMBER

Sir Arthur Hirries, Baronet, of Hirriehugh, in a northern county, came to the decision to sell his timber, in that state of mind—common during the war—which may be called patrio-profiteering. Like newspaper proprietors, writers on strategy, ship-builders, owners of factories, makers of arms and the rest of the working classes at large, his mood was: 'Let me serve my country, and if thereby my profits are increased, let me put up with it, and invest in National Bonds.'

With an encumbered estate and some of the best coverts in that northern county, it had not become practical politics to sell his timber till the Government wanted it at all costs. To let his shooting had been more profitable, until now, when a patriotic action and a stroke of business had become synonymous. A man of sixty-five, but not yet grey, with a reddish tinge in his moustache, cheeks, lips and eyelids, slightly knock-kneed, and with large, rather spreading feet, he moved in the best circles in a somewhat embarrassed manner. At the enhanced price, the timber at Hirriehugh

would enfranchise him for the remainder of his days. He sold it therefore one day of April when the war news was bad, to a Government official on the spot. He sold it at half-past five in the afternoon, practically for cash down, and drank a stiff whisky and soda to wash away the taste of the transaction; for, though no sentimentalist, his great-great-grandfather had planted most of it, and his grandfather the rest. Royalty, too, had shot there in its time and he himself (never much of a sportsman) had missed more birds in the rides and hollows of his fine coverts than he cared to remember. But the country was in need, and the price considerable. Bidding the Government official good-bye, he lighted a cigar, and went across the park to take a farewell stroll among his timber.

He entered the home covert by a path leading through a group of pear-trees just coming into bloom. Smoking cigars and drinking whisky in the afternoon in preference to tea, Sir Arthur Hirries had not much sense of natural beauty. But those pear-trees impressed him, greenish white against blue sky and fleecy thick clouds which looked as if they had snow in them. They were deuced pretty, and promised a good year for fruit, if they escaped the late frosts, though it certainly looked like freezing to-night! He paused a moment

at the wicket gate to glance back at those scantily clothed white maidens posing on the outskirts of his timber. Such was not the vision of Sir Arthur Hirries, who was considering how he should invest the balance of the cash down after paying off his mortgages. National Bonds—the country was in need!

Passing through the gate he entered the ride of the home covert. Variety lay like colour on his woods. They stretched for miles, and his ancestors had planted almost every kind of tree—beech, oak, birch, sycamore, ash, elm, hazel, holly, pine; a lime-tree and a hornbeam here and there, and further in among the winding coverts, spinneys and belts of larch. The evening air was sharp, and sleet showers came whirling from those bright clouds; he walked briskly, drawing at his richly fragrant cigar, the whisky still warm within him. He walked thinking, with a gentle melancholy slowly turning a little sulky, that he would never again be pointing out with his shooting stick to such or such a guest where he was to stand to get the best birds over him. The pheasants had been let down during the war, but he put up two or three old cocks, who went clattering and whirring out to left and right; and rabbits crossed the rides quietly to and fro, within easy shot. He came to where

Royalty had stood fifteen years ago during the last drive. He remembered Royalty saying: "Very pretty shooting at that last stand, Hirries; birds just about as high as I like them." The ground indeed rose rather steeply there, and the timber was oak and ash, with a few dark pines sprinkled into the bare greyish twiggery of the oaks, always costive in spring, and the just greening feather of the ashes.

"They'll be cutting those pines first," he thought —strapping trees, straight as the lines of Euclid, and free of branches, save at their tops. In the brisk wind those tops swayed a little and gave forth soft complaint. 'Three times my age,' he thought; 'prime timber.' The ride wound sharply and entered a belt of larch, whose steep rise entirely barred off the rather sinister sunset—a dark and wistful wood, delicate dun and grey, whose green shoots and crimson tips would have perfumed the evening coolness, but for the cigar smoke in his nostrils. 'They'll have this spinney for pit props,' he thought; and, taking a cross ride through it, he emerged in a heathery glen of birch-trees. No forester, he wondered if they would make anything of those whitened, glistening shapes. His cigar had gone out now, and he leaned against one of the satin-smooth stems, under the lacery of twig

and bud, sheltering the flame of a relighting match. A hare lopped away among the bilberry shoots; a jay, painted like a fan, squawked and flustered past him up the glen. Interested in birds, and wanting just one more jay to complete a fine stuffed group of them, Sir Arthur, though devoid of a gun, followed, to see where 'the beggar's' nest was. The glen dipped rapidly, and the character of the timber changed, assuming greater girth and solidity. There was a lot of beech here —a bit he did not know, for though taken-in by the beaters, no guns could be stationed there because of the lack of undergrowth. The jay had vanished, and light had begun to fail. 'Must get back,' he thought, 'or I shall be late for dinner.' For a moment he debated whether to retrace his steps, or cut across the beeches and regain the home covert by a loop. The jay, reappearing to the left, decided him to cross the beech grove. He did so, and took a narrow ride up through a dark bit of mixed timber with heavy undergrowth. The ride, after favouring the left for a little, bent away to the right; Sir Arthur followed it hurriedly, conscious that twilight was gathering fast. It must bend again to the left in a minute! It did, and then to the right, and, the undergrowth remaining thick, he could only follow on, or else retrace his steps.

He followed on, beginning to get hot in spite of a sleet shower falling through the dusk. He was not framed by Nature for swift travelling—his knees turning in and his toes turning out—but he went at a good bat, uncomfortably aware that the ride was still taking him away from home, and expecting it at any minute to turn left again. It did not, and hot, out of breath, a little bewildered, he stood still in three-quarter darkness, to listen. Not a sound, save that of wind in the tops of the trees, and a faint creaking of timber, where two stems had grown athwart and were touching.

The path was a regular will o' the wisp. He must make a bee line of it through the undergrowth into another ride! He had never before been amongst his timber in the dusk, and he found the shapes of the confounded trees more weird, and as if menacing, that he had ever dreamed of. He stumbled quickly on in and out of them among the undergrowth, without coming to a ride.

'Here I am stuck in this damned wood!' he thought. To call these formidably encircling shapes 'a wood' gave him relief. After all, it was *his* wood, and nothing very untoward could happen to a man in his own wood, however dark it might get; he could not be more than a mile and a half at the outside from his dining-room! He looked

at his watch, whose hands he could just see—nearly half-past seven! The sleet had become snow, but it hardly fell on him, so thick was the timber just here. But he had no overcoat, and suddenly he felt that first sickening little drop in his chest which presages alarm. Nobody knew he was in this damned wood! And in a quarter of an hour it would be black as your hat! He *must* get on and out! The trees amongst which he was stumbling produced quite a sick feeling now in one who hitherto had never taken trees seriously. What monstrous growths they were! The thought that seeds, tiny seeds or saplings, planted by his ancestors, could attain such huge impending and imprisoning bulk—the ghostly great growths, mounting up to heaven and shutting off this world, exasperated and unnerved him. He began to run, caught his foot in a root, and fell flat on his face. The cursed trees seemed to have a down on him! Rubbing elbows and forehead with his snow-wetted hands, he leaned against a trunk to get his breath, and summon the sense of direction to his brain. Once as a young man he had been 'bushed' at night in Vancouver Island; quite a scary business! But he had come out all right, though his camp had been the only civilised spot within a radius of twenty miles. And here he was, on his own estate,

within a mile or two of home, getting into a funk. It was childish! And he laughed. The wind answered, sighing and threshing in the tree tops. There must be a regular blizzard blowing now, and, to judge by the cold, from the north—but whether north-east or north-west was the question. Besides, how keep definite direction without a compass in the dark? The timber, too, with its thick trunks, diverted the wind into keen, directionless draughts. He looked up, but could make nothing of the two or three stars that he could see. It was a mess! And he lighted a second cigar with some difficulty, for he had begun to shiver. The wind in this blasted wood cut through his Norfolk jacket and crawled about his body, which had become hot from his exertions, and now felt clammy and half-frozen. This would mean pneumonia, if he didn't look out! And, half feeling his way from trunk to trunk, he started on again, but for all he could tell he might be going round in a circle, might even be crossing rides without realising, and again that sickening drop occurred in his chest. He stood still and shouted. He had the feeling of shouting into walls of timber, dark and heavy, which threw the sound back at him.

'Curse you!' he thought. 'Wish I'd sold you six months ago!' The wind fleered and mowed in

the tree tops; and he started off again at a run in that dark wilderness; till, hitting his head against a low branch, he fell, stunned. He lay several minutes unconscious, came to himself deadly cold, and struggled up on to his feet.

'By Jove!' he thought, with a sort of stammer in his brain; 'this is a bad business! I may be out here all night!' For an unimaginative man, it was extraordinary what vivid images he had just then. He saw the face of the Government official who had bought his timber, and the slight grimace with which he had agreed to the price. He saw his butler, after the gong had gone, standing like a stuck pig by the sideboard, waiting for him to come down. What would they do when he didn't come? Would they have the *nous* to imagine that he might have lost his way in the coverts, and take lanterns and search for him? Far more likely they would think he had walked over to Greenlands or Berrymoor, and stayed there to dinner. And, suddenly, he saw himself slowly freezing out here, in the snowy night, among this cursed timber. With a vigorous shake, he butted again into the darkness among the tree trunks. He was angry now—with himself, with the night, with the trees; so angry that he actually let out with his fist at a trunk against which he had

stumbled, and scored his knuckles. It was humiliating; and Sir Arthur Hirries was not accustomed to humiliation. In anybody else's wood—yes; but to be lost like this in one's own coverts! Well, if he had to walk all night, he would get out! And he plunged on doggedly in the darkness.

He was fighting with his timber now, as if the thing were alive and each tree an enemy. In the interminable stumbling exertion of that groping progress his angry mood gave place to half-comatose philosophy. Trees! His great-great-grandfather had planted them! His own was the fifth man's life, but the trees were almost as young as ever; they made nothing of a man's life! He sniggered: and a man made nothing of theirs! Did they know they were going to be cut down? All the better if they did, and were sweating in their shoes. He pinched himself—his thoughts were becoming so queer! He remembered that once, when his liver was out of order, trees had seemed to him like solid, tall diseases—bulbous, scarred, cavernous, witch-armed, fungoid emanations of the earth. Well, so they were! And he was among them, on a snowy pitch-black night, engaged in this death-struggle! The occurrence of the word death in his thoughts brought him up all standing. Why couldn't he concentrate his mind on getting

out; why was he mooning about the life and nature of trees instead of trying to remember the conformation of his coverts, so as to rekindle in himself some sense of general direction? He struck a number of matches, to get a sight of his watch again. Great heaven! He had been walking nearly two hours since he last looked at it; and in what direction? They said a man in a fog went round and round because of some kink in his brain! He began now to feel the trees, searching for a hollow trunk. A hollow would be some protection from the cold—his first conscious confession of exhaustion. He was not in training, and he was sixty-five. The thought: 'Can't keep this up much longer,' caused a second explosion of sullen anger. Damnation! Here he was—for all he could tell—standing where he had sat perhaps a dozen times on his spread shooting stick; watching sunlight on bare twigs, or the nose of his spaniel twitching beside him, listening to the tap of the beaters' sticks, and the shrill, drawn-out: "Marrk! Cock over!" Would they let the dogs out, to pick up his tracks? No! ten to one they would assume he was staying the night at the Summertons, or at Lady Mary's, as he had done before now, after dining there. And suddenly his strained heart leaped. He had struck a ride again! His mind

slipped back into place like an elastic let-go, relaxed, quivering gratefully. He had only to follow this ride, and somewhere, somehow, he would come out. And be hanged if he would let them know what a fool he had made of himself! Right or left—which way? He turned so that the flying snow came on his back, hurrying forward between the denser darkness on either hand, where the timber stood in walls, moving his arms across and across his body, as if dragging a concertina to full stretch, to make sure that he was keeping in the path. He went what seemed an interminable way like this, till he was brought up all standing by trees, and could find no outlet, no continuation. Turning in his tracks, with the snow in his face now, he retraced his steps till once more he was brought-up short by trees. He stood panting. It was ghastly—ghastly! And in a panic he dived this way and that to find the bend, the turning, the way on. The sleet stung his eyes, the wind fleered and whistled, the boughs sloughed and moaned. He struck matches, trying to shade them with his cold, wet hands, but one by one they went out, and still he found no turning. The ride must be blind-alley at either end, the turning be down the side somewhere! Hope revived in him. Never say die! He began a second retracing of his steps,

feeling the trunks along one side, to find a gap. His breath came with difficulty. What would old Brodley say if he could see him, soaked, sweating, frozen, tired to death, stumbling along in the darkness among this cursed timber—old Brodley who had told him his heart was in poor case! . . . A gap? Ah! No trunks—a ride at last! He turned, felt a sharp pain in his knee and pitched forward. He could not rise—the knee dislocated six years ago was out again. Sir Arthur Hirries clenched his teeth. Nothing more could happen to him! But after a minute—blank and bitter—he began to crawl along the new ride. Oddly he felt less discouraged and alarmed on hands and knee—for he could use but one. It was a relief to have his eyes fixed on the ground, not peering at the tree trunks; or perhaps there was less strain for the moment on his heart. He crawled, stopping every minute or so, to renew his strength. He crawled mechanically, waiting for his heart, his knee, his lungs to stop him. The earth was snowed over, and he could feel its cold wetness as he scraped along. Good tracks to follow, if anybody struck them! But in this dark forest——! In one of his halts, drying his hands as best he could, he struck a match, and sheltering it desperately, fumbled out his watch. Past ten o'clock. He wound the watch,

and put it back against his heart. If only he could wind his heart! And squatting there he counted his matches—four! He thought grimly: 'I won't light them to show me my blasted trees. I've got a cigar left; I'll keep them for that!' And he crawled on again. He must keep going while he could!

He crawled till his heart and lungs and knee struck work; and, leaning his back against a tree, sat huddled together, so exhausted that he felt nothing save a sort of bitter heartache. He even dropped asleep, waking with a shudder, dragged from a dream arm-chair at the Club into this cold, wet darkness and the blizzard moaning in the trees. He tried to crawl again, but could not, and for some minutes stayed motionless, hugging his body with his arms. 'Well,' he thought vaguely, 'I *have* done it!' His mind was in such lethargy that he could not even pity himself. His matches: could he make a fire? But he was no woodsman, and, though he groped around, could find no fuel that was not soaking wet. He scraped a hole and with what papers he had in his pockets tried to kindle the wet wood. No good! He had only two matches left now, and he remembered his cigar. He took it out, bit the end off, and began with infinite precautions to prepare for lighting it. The

first burned, and the cigar drew. He had one match left, in case he dozed and let the thing go out. Looking up through the blackness he could see a star. He fixed his eyes on it, and leaning against the trunk drew the smoke down into his lungs. With his arms crossed tightly on his breast he smoked very slowly. When it was finished—what? Cold, and the wind in the trees until the morning! Halfway through the cigar, he dozed off, slept a long time, and woke up so cold that he could barely summon vitality enough to strike his last match. By some miracle it burned, and he got his cigar to draw again. This time he smoked it nearly to its end, without mentality, almost without feeling, except the physical sense of bitter cold. Once with a sudden clearing of the brain, he thought faintly: 'Thank God, I sold the —trees, and they'll all come down!' The thought drifted away in frozen incoherence, drifted out like his cigar smoke into the sleet; and with a faint grin on his lips he dozed off again. . . .

An under-keeper found him at ten o'clock next morning, blue from cold, under a tall elm-tree, within a mile of his bed, one leg stretched out, the other hunched up toward his chest, with its foot dug into the undergrowth for warmth, his head huddled into the collar of his coat, his arms crossed

on his breast. They said he must have been dead at least five hours. Along one side snow had drifted against him; but the trunk had saved his back and other side. Above him, the spindly top boughs of that tall tree were covered with green-gold clusters of tiny crinkled elm flowers, against a deep blue sky—gay as a song of perfect praise. The wind had dropped, and after the cold of the night the birds were singing their clearest in the sunshine.

They did not cut down the elm-tree under which they found his body, with the rest of the sold timber, but put a little iron fence round it, and a little tablet on its trunk.

1920.

SANTA LUCIA

RETURNING from the English church at Monte Carlo towards his hotel, old Trevillian paused at a bend in the road to rest his thin calves. Through a mimosa-tree the sea was visible, very blue, and Trevillian's eyes rested on it with the filmy brown stare of old age.

Monte Carlo was changed, but that blue, tideless, impassive sea was the same as on his first visit forty-five years ago, and this was pleasant to one conservative by nature. Since then he had married, made money and inherited more, 'raised,' as Americans called it, a family—all, except his daughter Agatha, out in the world—had been widowed, and developed old man's cough. He and Agatha now left The Cedars, their country house in Hertfordshire, for the Riviera, with the annual regularity of swallows. Usually they stayed at Nice or Cannes, but this year, because a friend of Agatha's was the wife of the English chaplain, they had chosen Monte Carlo.

It was near the end of their stay, and the April sun hot.

Trevillian passed a thin hand down his thin,

brown, hairy face, where bushy eyebrows were still dark but the pointed beard white, and the effect, under a rather wide-brimmed brown hat, almost too Spanish for an English bank director. He was fond of saying that some of the best Cornish families had Spanish blood in their veins; whether Iberian or Armadesque he did not specify. The theory in any case went well with his formalism, growing more formal every year.

Agatha having stayed in with a cold, he had been to service by himself. A poor gathering! The English out here were a rackety lot. Among the congregation to whom he had that morning read the lessons he had noted, for instance, that old blackguard Telford, who had run off with two men's wives in his time, and was now living with a Frenchwoman, they said. What on earth was *he* doing in church? And that ostracised couple, the Gaddenhams, who had the villa near Roquebrune? She used his name, but they had never been married, for Gaddenham's wife was still alive. And, more seriously, had he observed Mrs. Rolfe, who before the war used to come with her husband —now in India—to The Cedars to shoot the coverts in November. Young Lord Chesherford was hanging about her, they said. That would end in scandal to a certainty. Never without uneasiness did he

see that woman, with whom his daughter was on terms of some intimacy. Grass widows were dangerous, especially in a place like this. He must give Agatha a hint. Such doubtful people, he felt, had no business to attend Divine service; yet it was difficult to disapprove of people coming to church, and, after all, most of them did not! A man of the world, however strong a churchman, could, of course, rub shoulders with anyone, but it was different when they came near one's womenfolk or into the halls of one's formal beliefs. To encroach like that showed no sense of the fitness of things. He must certainly speak to Agatha.

The road had lain uphill, and he took breaths of the mimosa-scented air, carefully regulating them so as not to provoke his cough. He was about to proceed on his way when a piano-organ across the road burst into tune. The man who turned the handle was the usual moustachioed Italian with restive eyes and a game leg; the animal who drew it the customary little grey donkey; the singer the proverbial dark girl with an orange head-kerchief; the song she sang the immemorial 'Santa Lucia.' Her brassy voice blared out the full metallic 'a's,' which seemed to hit the air as hammers hit the wires of a czymbal. Trevillian had some music in his soul; he often started out for the Casino concert,

though he generally arrived in the playing-rooms, not, indeed, to adventure more than a five-franc piece or two, for he disapproved of gambling, but because their motley irregularity titillated his formalism, made him feel like a boy a little out of school. He could distinguish, however, between several tunes, and knew this to be neither 'God Save the King,' 'Rule Britannia,' 'Tipperary,' nor 'Funiculi-Funicula.' Indeed, it had to him a kind of separate ring, a resonance oddly intimate, as if in some other life it had been the beating, the hammering rhythm of his heart. Queer sensation—quite a queer sensation! And he stood, blinking. Of course, he knew that tune now that he heard the words—Santa Lucia; but in what previous existence had its miauling awakened something deep, hot, almost savage within him, sweet and luring like a strange fruit or the scent of a tropical flower? 'San-ta Luci-i-a! San-ta Luci-i-a!' Lost! And yet so close to the fingers of his recollection that they itched! The girl stopped singing and came across to him—a gaudy baggage, with her orange scarf, her beads, the whites of her eyes, and all those teeth! These Latins, emotional, vibrant, light-hearted and probably light-fingered—an inferior race! He felt in his pocket, produced a franc, and moved on slowly.

But at the next bend in the road he halted again. The girl had recommenced, in gratitude for his franc—'Santa Luci-ia!' What was it buried in him under the fallen leaves of years and years?

The pink clusters of a pepper-tree dropped from behind a low garden wall right over him while he stood there. The air tingled with its faint savourous perfume, true essence of the South. And again that conviction of a previous existence, of something sweet, burning, poignant, caught him in the Adam's apple veiled by his beard. Was it something he had dreamed? Was that the matter with him now—while the organ wailed, the girl's song vibrated? Trevillian's stare lighted on the prickly pears and aloes above the low, pink wall. The savagery of those plants jerked his mind forward almost to the pitch of—what? A youth passed, smoking a maize-coloured cigarette, leaving a perfume of Latakia, that tobacco of his own youth when he, too, smoked cigarettes made of its black, strong, fragrant threads. He gazed blankly at the half-obliterated name on the dilapidated garden gate, and spelled it aloud: "V lla Be u S te. Villa Beau Site! Beau——! By God! I've got it!"

At the unbecoming vigour of his ejaculation a smile of release, wrinkling round his eyes, furrowed

his thin brown cheeks. He went up to the gate. What a coincidence! The very——! He stood staring into a tangled garden through the fog of forty-five years, resting his large prayer-book with its big print on the top rail of the old green gate; then, looking up and down the road like a boy about to steal cherries, he lifted the latch and passed in.

Nobody lived here now, he should say. The old pink villa, glimpsed some sixty yards away at the end of that little wilderness, was shuttered, and its paint seemed peeling off. Beau Site! That *was* the name! And this the gate he had been wont to use into this lower garden, invisible from the house. And—yes—here was the little fountain, broken and discoloured now, with the same gargoyle face, and water still dripping from its mouth. And here—the old stone seat his cloak had so often covered. Grown over now, all of it; unpruned the lilacs, mimosas, palms, making that dry rustling when the breeze crept into them. He opened his prayer-book, laid it on the seat, and carefully sat down—he never sat on unprotected stone. He had passed into another world, screened from any eye by the overgrown shrubs and tangled foliage. And, slowly, while he sat there the frost of nearly half a century thawed.

Yes! Little by little, avidly, yet as it were unwillingly, he remembered—sitting on his prayer-book, out of the sun, under the flowering tangled trees.

He had been twenty-six, just after he went into the family bank—he recollected—such a very sucking partner. A neglected cold had given him the first of those bronchial attacks of which he was now reaping the aftermath. Those were the days when, in the chill of a London winter, he would, dandy-like, wear thin underclothes and no overcoat. Still coughing at Easter, he had taken three weeks off and a ticket to Mentone. A cousin of his was engaged to a Russian girl whose family had a villa there, and he had pitched his tent in a little hotel almost next door. The Russians of *that* day were the Russians of the Turgenev novels, which Agatha had made him read. A simple, trilingual family of gentlefolk, the Rostakovs—father, mother, and two daughters. What was it they had called *him*—Philip Philipovitch? Monsieur Rostakov with his beard, his witty French stories, imperfectly understood by young Trevillian, his zest for food and drink, his thick lips, and, as they said, his easy morals—quite a dog in his way! And Madame, *née* Princesse Nogárin (a Tartar strain in her, his cousin said), 'spirituelle,' somewhat worn out by

Monsieur Rostakov and her belief in the transmigration of souls. And Varvara, the eldest daughter, the one engaged; only seventeen, with deep-grey, truthful eyes, a broad, grave face, dark hair, and a candour, by George! which had almost frightened him. And the little one, Katrina, blue-eyed, snub-nosed, fair-haired, with laughing lips, yet very serious too; charming little creature, whose death from typhoid three years later had given him quite a shock. Delightful family, seen through the mists of time. And now in all the world you couldn't find a Russian family like that. Gone! Vanished from the face of the earth! Their estates had been —ah!—somewhere in South Russia, and a house near Yalta. Cosmopolitan, yet very Russian, with their *samovar* and their *zakouskas*—a word he had never learned to spell—and Rostakov's little glasses of white vodka, and those caviare sandwiches that the girls and he used to take on their picnics to Gorbio and Castellar and Belle Enda, riding donkeys, and chaperoned by that amiable young German lady, their governess. . . . Germans in those days—how different they were! How different the whole of life! The girls riding in their wide skirts, under parasols, the air unspoiled by the fumes of petrol, the carriages with their jangling-belled little horses and bright harness;

priests in black; soldiers in bright trousers and yellow shakoes; and beggars—plenty. The girls would gather wild flowers and press them afterwards; and in the evening Varvara would look at him with her grave eyes and ask him whether he believed in a future life. He had no beliefs to speak of then, if he remembered rightly; they had come with increasing income, family, and business responsibilities. It had always seemed to hurt her that he thought of sport and dress, and not of his soul. The Russians in those days seemed so tremendously concerned about the soul—an excellent thing, of course, but not what one talked of. Still, that first fortnight had been quite idyllic. He remembered one Sunday afternoon—queer how such a little thing could stay in the mind!—on the beach near Cap Martin flicking sand off his boots with his handkerchief and Varvara saying: "And then to your face again, Philip Philipovitch?" She was always saying things which made him feel uncomfortable. And in the little letter which Katrina wrote him a year later, with blue forget-me-nots all about the paper, she had reminded him of how he had blushed. Charming young girls—simple—no such nowadays! The dew was off. They had thought Monte Carlo a vulgar place. What would they think of it now, by Jove! Even Rostakov

only went there on the quiet—a *viveur* that fellow, who would always be living a double life. Trevillian recollected how, under the spell of that idyllic atmosphere, and afraid of Varvara's eyes, he himself had put off from day to day his visit to the celebrated haunt, until one evening when Madame Rostakov had *migraine* and the girls were at a party he had sauntered to the station and embarked on a Monte Carlo train. How clearly it came back to him—the winding path up through the Gardens, a beautiful still evening, scented and warm, the Casino orchestra playing the Love music from 'Faust,' the one opera that he knew well. The darkness, strange with exotic foliage, glimmering with golden lamps—none of this glaring white electric light—had deeply impressed him, who, for all his youthful dandyism, had Puritanism in his blood and training. It was like going up to—well, not precisely heaven. And in his white beard old Trevillian uttered a slight cackle. Anyway, he had entered 'the rooms' with a beating heart. He had no money to throw away in those days; by Jove, no! His father had kept him strictly to an allowance of four hundred a year, and his partnership was still in the apprentice stage. He had only some ten or twenty pounds to spare. But to go back to England and have his fellows say,

"What? Monte Carlo, and never played?" was not to be thought of.

His first sensation in 'the rooms' was disappointing. The decorations were florid, the people foreign, queer, ugly! For some time he stood still listening to the chink of rake against coin, and the nasal twang of the croupiers' voices. Then he had gone up to a table to watch the game, which he had never played. That, at all events, was the same as now; that and the expression on the gamblers' faces—the sharp, blind, crab-like absorption like no other human expression. And what a lot of old women! A nervous excitement had crept into his brain while he stood there, an itch into his fingers. But he was shy. All these people played with such deadly calm, seemed so utterly familiar with it all. At last he had reached over the shoulder of a dark-haired woman sitting in front of him, put down a five-franc piece, and called out the word '*Vingt.*' A rake shovelled it forward on to the number with an indifferent click. The ball rolled. "*Quatorze, rouge pair et manque.*" His five-franc piece was raked away. But he, Philip Trevillian, had gambled at Monte Carlo, and at once he had seemed to see Varvara's eyes with something of amusement in their candour, and to hear her voice: "But to gamble! How silly, Philip

Philipovitch!" Then the man sitting to his left got up, and he had slipped down into the empty chair. Once seated, he knew that he must play. So he pushed another five-franc piece on to black and received its counterpart. Now he was quits; and, continuing that simple stake with varying success, he began taking in the faces of his neighbours. On his left he had an old Englishman in evening dress, ruddy, with chubby lips, who played in gold pieces and seemed winning rather heavily. Opposite, in a fabulous shawl, a bird-like old woman, with a hook nose, and a man who looked like a Greek bandit in a frock-coat. To his right was the dark-haired woman over whose shoulder he had leaned. An agreeable perfume, as of jasmine blossoms, floated from her. She had some tablets and six or seven gold pieces before her, but seemed to have stopped playing. Out of the tail of his eye Trevillian scrutinised her profile. She was by far the most attractive woman he had seen in here. And he felt suddenly uninterested in the fate of his five-franc pieces. Under the thin, dark brows, a little drawn down, he could see that her eyes were dark and velvety. Her face was rather pointed, delicate, faintly powdered in the foreign fashion. She wore a low dress, but with a black lace scarf thrown over her

gleaming shoulders, and something that glimmered in her dark hair. She was not English, but what he could not tell. He won twice running on black, left his stake untouched, and was conscious that she pushed one of her own gold pieces on to black. Again black won. Again he left his stake, and she hers. To be linked with her by that following of his luck was agreeable to young Trevillian. The devil might care—he would leave his winnings down. Again and again, till he had won eight times on black, he left his stake, and his neighbour followed suit. A pile of gold was mounting in front of each of them. The eyes of the hawk-like old woman opposite, like those of a crustacean in some book of natural history, seemed pushed out from her face; a little hard smile on her thin lips seemed saying, 'Wait; it will all go back!' The jasmine perfume from his neighbour grew stronger, as though disengaged by increasing emotion; he could see her white neck heave under its black lace. She reached her hand out as though to gather in her winnings. In bravado Trevillian sat unmoving. Her eyes slid round to his; she withdrew her hand. The little ball rolled. Black! He heard her sigh of relief. She touched his arm. "*Retirez!*" she whispered, "*Retirez, monsieur!*" and, sweeping in her winnings, she got up. Tre-

villian hesitated just a moment, then with the thought, 'If I stay I lose sight of her,' he, too, reached out, and, gathering in his pile, left the table. Starting with a five-franc piece, in nine successful coups he had won just over a hundred pounds. His neighbour, who had started with a louis, in seven coups—he calculated rapidly—must have won the same. "*Seize, rouge pair et manque!*" Just in time! Elated, Trevillian turned away. There was the graceful figure of his dark neighbour threading the throng, and without deliberate intention, yet longing not to lose sight of her, he followed. A check in her progress brought him so close, however, that he was at infinite pains to seem unconscious. She turned and saw him. "Ah! *Merci, monsieur!* I tank you moch." "It's for me to thank you!" he stammered. The dark lady smiled. "I have the instinct," she said in her broken English, "for others, not for myself. I am unlucky. It is the first time you play, sare? I tought so. Do not play again. Give me that promise; it will make me 'appy."

Her eyes were looking into his. Never in his life had he seen anything so fascinating as her face with its slightly teasing smile, her figure in the lacy black dress swinging out Spanish fashion

from the hips, and the scarf flung about her shoulders. He had made the speech then which afterwards seemed to him so foreign.

"Charmed to promise anything that will make you happy, madame."

She clasped her hands like a pleased child.

"That is a bargain; now I have repaid you."

"May I find your carriage?"

"I am walkin', monsieur."

With desperate courage he had murmured:

"Then may I escort you?"

"But certainly."

Sitting on his prayer-book, Trevillian burrowed into the past. What had he felt, thought, fancied, in those moments while she had gone to get her cloak? Who and what was she? Into what whirlpool drawing him? How nearly he had bolted—back to the idyllic, to Varvara's searching candour and Katrina's laughing innocence, before she was there beside him, lace veiling her hair, face, eyes, like an Eastern woman, and her fingers had slipped under his sleeve. . . . What a walk! What sense of stepping into the unknown; strange intimacy and perfect ignorance! Perhaps every man had some such moment in his life—of pure romance, of adventuring at all and any cost. He had restrained the impulse to press that slender

hand closely to his side, had struggled to preserve the perfect delicacy worthy of the touching confidence of so beautiful a lady. Italian, Spanish, Polish, Bohemian? Married, widowed? She told him nothing; he asked no questions. Instinct or shyness kept him dumb, but with a whirling brain. And the night above them had seemed the starriest ever seen, the sweetest scented, the most abandoned by all except himself and her. They had come to the gate of this very garden, and, opening it, she had said:

"Here is my home. You have been perfect for me, monsieur."

Her lightly resting fingers were withdrawn. Trevillian remembered, with a sort of wonder, how he had kissed those fingers.

"I am always at your service, madame."

Her lips had parted; her eyes had an arch sweetness he had never seen before or since in woman.

"Every night I play. *Au revoir!*"

He had listened to her footsteps on the path, watched lights go up in the house which looked so empty now behind him, watched them put out again, and, retracing his steps, had learned by heart their walk from the Casino, till he was sure he could not miss his way to that garden gate by

day or night. . . . A fluster of breeze came into the jungle where he sat, and released the dry rustle of the palm-tree leaves. *"On fait des folies!"* as the French put it. Loose lot, the French! Queer what young men would go through when they were 'making madnesses.' And, plucking a bit of lilac, old Trevillian put it to his nose, as though seeking explanation for the madnesses of youth. What had he been like then? Thin as a lath, sunburnt—he used to pride himself on being sunburnt—a little black moustache, a dandy about clothes. The memory of his youthful looks warmed him, sitting there, chilly from old age. . . .

"On fait des folies!" All next day he had been restless, uneasy, at the Villa Rostakov under the question in Varvara's eyes, and Lord knew what excuse he had made for not going there that evening! Ah! And what of his solemn resolutions to find out all about his dark lady, not to run his head into some foreign noose, not to compromise her or himself? They had all gone out of his head the moment he set eyes on her again, and he had never learned anything but her name—Iñez—in all those three weeks, nor told anything of himself, as if both had felt that knowledge must destroy romance. When had he known him-

self of interest to her—the second night, the third? The look in her eyes! The pressure of her arm against his own! On this very seat, with his cloak spread to guard her from the chill, he had whispered his turbulent avowals. Not free! No such woman could be free. What did it matter? Disinheritance—ostracism—exile! All such considerations had burned like straws in the fire he had felt, sitting by her in the darkness, his arm about her, her shoulder pressed to his. With mournful mockery she had gazed at him, kissed his forehead, slipped away up the dark garden. God, what a night after that! Wandering up and down along by the sea—devoured. Funny to look back on—deuced funny! A woman's face to have such power. And with a little shock he remembered that never in all the few weeks of that mad business had he seen her face by daylight! Of course, he had left Mentone at once—no offering his madness up to the candid eyes of those two girls, to the cynical stare of that old *viveur* Rostakov. But no going home, though his leave was up; he was his own master yet awhile, thanks to his winnings. And then—the deluge. Literally—a night when the rain came down in torrents, drenching him through cape and clothes while he stood waiting for her. It was after that drenching

night which had kept them apart that she had returned his passion. . . . A wild young devil! The madness of those nights beneath these trees by the old fountain! How he used to sit waiting on this bench in the darkness with heart fluttering, trembling, aching with expectancy! . . . Gad, how he had ached and fluttered on that seat! What fools young men could be! And yet in all his life had there been weeks so wildly sweet as those? Weeks the madness of which could stir in him still this strange youthful warmth. Rubbing his veined, thin hands together, he held them out into a streak of sunlight and closed his eyes. . . . There, coming through the gate into the deeper shadow, dark in her black dress—always black—the gleam of her neck when she bent and pressed his head to it! Through the rustling palm-leaves the extinct murmuring of their two voices, the beating of their two hearts. . . . Madness indeed! His back gave a little crick. He had been very free from lumbago lately. Confound it—a premonitory twinge! Close to his feet a lizard rustled out into the patch of sunlight, motionless but for tongue and eyes, looked at him with head to one side—queer, quick, dried-looking little object! . . . And then —the end! What a Jezebel of cruelty he had thought her! Now he could see its wisdom and

its mercy. By George! She had blown their wild weeks out like a candle-flame! Vanished! Vanished into the unknown as she had come from the unknown; left him to go, haggard and burnt-up, back to England and bank routine, to the social and moral solidity of a pillar of society. . . .

Like that lizard whisking its tail and vanishing beneath the dead dry leaves, so she had vanished—as if into the earth. Could she ever have felt for him as he for her? Did women ever know such consuming fires? Trevillian shrugged his thin shoulders. She had seemed to; but—how tell? Queer cattle—women!

Two nights he had sat here, waiting, sick with anxiety and longing. A third day he had watched outside the villa, closed, shuttered, abandoned; not a sound from it, not a living thing, but one white-and-yellow cat. He pitied himself even now, thinking of that last vigil. For three days more he had hung around, haunting Casino, garden, villa. No sign! No sign! . . .

Trevillian rose; his back had given him another twinge. He examined the seat and his open prayer-book. Had he overlapped it, on to damp stone? He frowned, smoothing superstitiously the pages a little creased and over-flattened by his weight. Closing the book, he went towards the

gate. Had those passionate hours been the best or the worst of his life? He did not know.

He moved out into the hot sunshine and up the road. Round the corner he came suddenly abreast of the old villa. 'It was here I stood,' he thought; 'just here!' What was that caterwauling? Ah! The girl and the organ—there they were again! What! Why, of course! That long-ago morning a barrel organ had come while he stood there in despair. He could see it still, grinding away, with a monkey on it, and a woman singing that same silly tune. With a dry, dusty feeling he turned and walked on. What had he been thinking of before? Oh, ah! The Rolfe woman and that young fool Chesherford. Yes, he would certainly warn Agatha, certainly warn her. They were a loose lot out here!

1921.

BLACKMAIL

I

THE affectionate if rather mocking friend who had said of Charles Granter, "He isn't a man, he's an edifice," seemed justified to the thin dark man following him down Oakley Street, Chelsea, that early October afternoon. From the square foundations of his feet to his square fair beard and the top of his head under a square black bowler, he looked solid as granite, indestructible—too big to be taken by the board—only fit to be submarined. And the man dodging in his wake right down to the Embankment ran up once or twice under his counter and fell behind again as if appalled by the vessel's size and unconsciousness. Considering the heat of the past summer the plane-trees were still very green, and few of their twittering leaves had dropped or turned yellow—just enough to confirm the glamorous melancholy of early fall. Granter, though he lived with his wife in some mansions close by, went out of his way to pass under those trees and look at the river. This seeming sign of weakness, perhaps, determined the

shadowy man to dodge up again and become stationary close behind. Ravaged and streaked, as if he had lived submerged, he stood carefully noting with his darting dark eyes that they were quite alone; then, swallowing violently so that the strings of his lean neck writhed, he moved stealthily up beside Granter, and said in a hurried, hoarse voice: "Beg pardon, mister—ten pound, and I'll say nothin'."

The face which Granter turned toward that surprising utterance was a good illustration of the saying 'things are not what they seem.' Above that big building of a body it quivered, ridiculously alive and complex, as of a man full of nerves, humours, sarcasms; and a deep continuous chinking sound arose—of Charles Granter jingling coins in his trousers' pocket. The quiver settled into raised eyebrows, into crow's-feet running out on to the broad cheekbones, into a sarcastic smile drooping the corners of the lips between moustache and beard. He said in his rather high voice:

"What's the matter with you, my friend?"

"There's a lot the matter with me, mister. Down and out I am. I know where you live, I know your lady; but—ten pound and I'll say nothin'."

"About what?"

"About your visiting that gell, where you've just come from. Ten pound. It's cheap—I'm a man of me word."

With lips still sarcastically drooped, Granter made a little derisive sound. "Blackmail, by George!"

"Guv'nor—I'm desperate, I mean to have that ten pound. You give it me here at six o'clock this evenin', if you 'aven't got it on you." His eyes flared suddenly in his hungry face. "But no tricks! I ain't killed Huns for nothin'."

Granter surveyed him for a moment, then turned his back and looked at the water.

"Well, you've got two hours to get it in—six o'clock, mister, just here; and no tricks—I warn you."

The hoarse voice ceased, the sound of footsteps died away; Granter was alone. The smile still clung to his lips, but he was not amused; he was annoyed with the measured indignation of a big man highly civilised and innocent. Where had this ruffian sprung from? To be spied on, without knowing it, like this! His ears grew red. The damned scoundrel!

The thing was too absurd to pay attention to. But, instantly, his highly-sophisticated consciousness began to pay it attention. How many visits had he made to this distressed flower-girl? Three?

And all because he didn't like handing over the case to that society which always found out the worst. They said private charity was dangerous. Apparently it was! Blackmail! A consideration came, perching like a crow on the branches of his mind: Why hadn't he mentioned the flower-girl to his wife and made *her* do the visiting? Why! Because Olga would have said the girl was a fraud. And perhaps she was! A put-up job! Would the scoundrel have ventured on this threat at all if the girl were not behind him? She might support him with lies! His wife might believe them—she—she had such a vein of cynicism! How sordid, how domestically unpleasant!

Granter felt quite sick. Every decent human value seemed suddenly in question. And a second crow came croaking: Could one leave a scoundrel like this to play his tricks with impunity? Oughtn't one to go to the police? He stood extraordinarily still—a dappled leaf dropped from a plane-tree and lodged on his bowler hat; at the other end of him a little dog mistook him for a lamp-post. This was no joke! For a man with a reputation for humanity, integrity and common sense—no joke at all! A police court meant the prosecution of a fellow-creature; getting him perhaps a year's imprisonment, when one had always felt that

punishment practically never fitted crime! Staring at the river he seemed to see cruelty hovering over himself, his wife, society, the flower-girl, even over that scoundrel—naked cruelty, waiting to pounce on one or all. Which ever way one turned the thing was dirty, cruel. No wonder blackmail was accounted such a heinous crime. No other human act was so cold-blooded, spider-like, and slimy; none plunged so deadly a dagger into the bowels of compassion, so eviscerated humanity, so murdered faith! And it would have been even worse, if his conscience had not been clear. But was it so extremely clear? Would he have taken the trouble to go to that flower-girl's dwelling, not once but three times, unless she had been attractive, unless her dark-brown eyes had been pretty, and her common voice so soft? Would he have visited the blowsy old flower-woman at that other corner, in circumstances, no doubt, just as strenuous? Honestly: No. Still, if he did like a pretty face he was not vicious—he was fastidious and detested subterfuge. But then Olga was so cynical, she would certainly ask him why he hadn't visited the old flower-woman as well, and the lame man who sold matches, and all the other stray unfortunates of the neighbourhood. *Well,* there it was; and a bold course always the best! The

bold course—which was it? To go to the police? To his wife? To that girl, and find out if she were in this ramp? To wait till six o'clock, meet the ruffian and shake the teeth out of him? Granter could not decide. All seemed equally bold—would do equally well. And a fifth course presented itself which seemed even bolder: Ignore the thing!

The tide had just turned, and the full waters below him were very still, of a sunlit soft grey colour. This stillness of the river restored to Charles Granter something of the impersonal mood in which he had crossed the Embankment to look at it. Here, by the mother stream of this great town, was he, tall, strong, well-fed, and, if not rich, quite comfortable; and here, too, were hundreds of thousands like that needy flower-girl and this shadowy scoundrel skating on the edge of destitution. And here was this water—to him a source of æsthetic enjoyment; to them—a possible last refuge. The girl had talked of it—beggar's patter, perhaps, like the blackmailer's words: "I'm desperate—I'm down and out."

One wanted to be just! If he had known all about them—but he knew nothing!

'Can't believe she's such an ungrateful little wretch!' he thought; 'I'll go back and see her.'

He retraced his way up Oakley Street to the

mews which she inhabited, and ascended a stairway scented with petrol. Through the open doorway he could see her baby, of doubtful authorship, seated in an empty flower-basket—a yellow baby, who stared up at him with the placidity of one recently fed. That stare seemed to Granter to be saying: 'You look out that you're not taken for my author. Have you got an alibi, old man?' And almost unconsciously he began to calculate where he had been about fourteen or fifteen months ago. Not in London—thank goodness! In Brittany with his wife—all that July, August, and September. Jingling his money, he contemplated the baby. It seemed more, but it *might* be only four months old! The baby opened a toothless mouth, "Ga" it said, and stretched out a tiny hand. Granter ceased to jingle the coins and gazed round the room. The first time he came, a month ago, to test her street-corner story, its condition had been deplorable. His theory that people were never better than their environments had prompted the second visit, and that of this afternoon. He had wanted to know that he was not throwing away his money. And there certainly was some appearance of comfort now in a room so small that he and the baby and a bed almost filled it. But he felt a fool for ever having come there even with

those best intentions which were the devil. And, turning to go, he saw the girl herself ascending the stairs, a paper bag in her hand, an evident bull's-eye in her mouth, for a scent of peppermint preceded her. Surely her cheekbones were higher than he had thought, her eyebrows more oblique —a gipsy look! Her eyes, dark and lustrous as a hound puppy's, smiled at him, and he said in his rather high voice:

"I came back to ask you something."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know a dark man with a thin face and a slight squint, who's been in the Army?"

"What's his name, sir?"

"I don't know; but he followed me from here, and tried to blackmail me on the Embankment. You know what blackmail is?"

"No, sir."

Feline, swift, furtive, she had passed him and taken up her baby, slanting her dark glance at him from behind it. Granter experienced a very queer sensation. Really it was as if—though he disliked poetic emphasis—as if he had suddenly seen something pre-civilised, pre-human, snake-like, cat-like, monkey-like too, in those dark sliding eyes and that yellow baby. She was in it; or, if not in it, she knew of it!

"A dangerous game, that," he said. "Tell him —for his own good—he had better drop it."

And, while he went, very square, downstairs, he thought: 'This is one of the finest opportunities you ever had for getting to the bottom of human nature, and you're running away from it.' So strongly did this thought obsess him that he halted, in two minds, outside. A chauffeur, who was cleaning his car, looked at him curiously. Charles Granter moved away.

II

When he reached the little drawing-room of their flat his wife was making tea. She was rather short, with a good figure, and brown eyes in a flattish face, powdered and by no means unattractive. She had Slav blood in her—Polish; and Granter never now confided to her the finer shades of his thoughts and conduct because she had long made him feel himself her superior in moral sensibility. He had no wish to feel superior—it was often very awkward; but he could not help it. In view of this attempt at blackmail, more than awkward. It was extraordinarily unpleasant to fall from a pedestal on which he did not wish to be.

He sat down, very large, in a lacquered chair

with black cushions, spoke of the leaves turning, saw her look at him and smile, and felt that she knew he was disturbed.

"Do you ever wonder," he said, tinkling his teaspoon, "about the lives that other people live?"

"What sort of people, Charles?"

"Oh—not our sort; match-sellers, don't you know, flower-sellers, people down and out?"

"No, I don't think I do."

If only he could tell her of this monstrous incident without slipping from his pedestal!

"It interests me enormously; there are such queer depths to reach, don't you know."

Her smile seemed to answer: 'You don't reach the depths in me.' And it was true. She was very Slav, with the warm gleam in her eyes and the opaque powdered skin of her comely face. An enigma—flatly an enigma! There were deep waters below the pedestal, like—like Philæ, with columns still standing in the middle of the Nile Dam. Absurd thought!

"I've often wondered," he said, "how I should feel if I were down and out."

"You're too large, Charles, and too dignified, my dear; you'd be on the Civil List before you could turn round."

Granter rose from the lacquered chair, jingling

his coins. The most vivid pictures at that moment were, like a film, unrolled before his mind—of the grey sunlit river and that accosting blackguard with his twisted murky face and lips uttering hoarse sounds; of the yellow baby, and the girl's gipsy-dark glance from behind it; of a police court, and himself standing there and letting the whole cart-load of the law fall on them. He said suddenly:

"I was blackmailed this afternoon on the Embankment."

She did not answer; and, turning with irritation, he saw that her fingers were in her ears.

"I do wish you wouldn't jingle your money so!" she said.

Confound it! She had not heard him.

"I've had an adventure," he began again. "You know the flower-girl who stands at that corner in Tite Street?"

"Yes; a gipsy baggage."

"H'm! Well, I bought a flower from her one day, and she told me such a pathetic story that I went to her den to see if it was true. It seemed to be, so I gave her some money, don't you know. Then I thought I'd better see how she was spending it, so I went to see her again, don't you know."

A faint "Oh! Charles!" caused him to hurry on.

"And—what do you think—a blackguard followed me to-day and tried to blackmail me for ten pounds on the Embankment."

A sound brought his face round to attention. His wife was lying back on the cushions of her chair in paroxysms of soft laughter.

It was clear to Granter, then, that what he had really been afraid of was just this. His wife would laugh at him—laugh at him slipping from the pedestal! Yes! It was that he had dreaded—not any disbelief in his fidelity. Somehow he felt too large to be laughed at. He *was* too large! Nature had set a size beyond which husbands——!

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," he said frigidly. "There's no more odious crime than blackmail."

His wife was silent; tears were trickling down her cheeks.

"Did you give it him?" she said in a strangled voice.

"Of course not."

"What was he threatening?"

"To tell you."

"But what?"

"His beastly interpretation of my harmless visits."

The tears had made runlets in her powder, and

he added viciously: "He doesn't know you, of course."

His wife dabbed her eyes, and a scent of geranium arose.

"It seems to me," said Granter, "that you'd be even more amused if there *were* something in it!"

"Oh, no, Charles, but—perhaps there is."

Granter looked at her fixedly.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, there is not."

He saw her cover her lips with that rag of handkerchief, and abruptly left the room.

He went into his study and sat down before the fire. So it was funny to be a faithful husband? And suddenly he thought: 'If my wife can treat this as a joke, what—what about herself?' A nasty thought! An unconscionable thought! Really, it was as though that blackmailing scoundrel had dirtied human nature till it seemed to function only from low motives. A church clock chimed. Six already! The ruffian would be back there on the Embankment waiting for his ten pounds. Granter rose. His duty was to go out and hand him over to the police.

'No!' he thought viciously, 'let him come here! I'd very much like him to come here. I'd teach him!'

But a sort of shame beset him. Like most very big men, he was quite unaccustomed to violence—had never struck a violent blow in his life, not even in his school-days—had never had occasion to. He went across to the window. From there he could just see the Embankment parapet through the trees in the failing light, and presently—sure enough—he made out the fellow's figure slinking up and down like a hungry dog. He stood watching, jingling his money—nervous, sarcastic, angry, very interested. What would the rascal do now? Would he beard this great block of flats? And was the girl down there too—the girl, with her yellow baby? He saw the slinking figure cross from the far side and vanish under the loom of the mansions. In that interesting moment Granter burst through the bottom of one of his trousers' pockets; several coins jingled on to the floor and rolled away. He was still looking for the last when he heard the door-bell ring—he had never really believed the ruffian would come up! Straightening himself abruptly, he went out into the hall. Service was performed by the mansions staff, so there was no one in the flat but himself and his wife. The bell rang again; and she, too, appeared.

"This is my Embankment friend, no doubt, who amuses you so much. I should like you to see

him," he said grimly. He noted a quizzical apology on her face and opened the hall door.

Yes! there stood the man! By electric light, in upholstered surroundings, more 'down and out' than ever. A bad lot, but a miserable poor wretch, with his broken boots, his thin, twisted, twitching face, his pinched shabby figure—only his hungry eyes looked dangerous.

"Come in," said Granter. "You want to see my wife, I think."

The man recoiled.

"I don't want to see 'er," he muttered, "unless you force me to. Give us *five* pound, guv'nor, and I won't worry you again. I don't want to cause trouble between man and wife."

"Come in," repeated Granter; "she's expecting you."

The man stood, silently passing a pale tongue over a pale upper lip, as though conjuring some new resolution from his embarrassment.

"Now, see 'ere, mister," he said suddenly, "you'll regret it if I come in—you will, straight."

"I shall regret it if you don't. You're a very interesting fellow, and an awful scoundrel."

"Well, who made me one?" the man burst out; "you answer me that."

"Are you coming in?"

"Yes, I am."

He came, and Granter shut the door behind him. It was like inviting a snake or a mad dog into one's parlour; but the memory of having been laughed at was so fresh within him that he rather welcomed the sensation.

"Now," he said, "have the kindness!" and opened the drawing-room door.

The man slunk in, blinking in the stronger light.

Granter went towards his wife, who was standing before the fire.

"This gentleman has an important communication to make to you, it seems."

The expression of her face struck him as peculiar—surely she was not frightened! And he experienced a kind of pleasure in seeing them both look so exquisitely uncomfortable.

"Well," he said ironically, "perhaps you'd like me not to listen." And, going back to the door, he stood leaning against it with his hands up to his ears. He saw the fellow give him a furtive look and go nearer to her; his lips moved rapidly, hers answered, and he thought: 'What on earth am I covering my ears for?' He took his hands away, and the man turned round.

"I'm goin' now, mister; a little mistake—sorry to 'ave troubled you."

His wife had turned to the fire again; and with a puzzled feeling Granter opened the door. As the fellow passed he took him by the arm, twisted him round into the study, and, locking the door, put the key into his pocket.

"Now then," he said, "you precious scoundrel!"

The man shifted on his broken boots. "Don't you hit me, guv'nor, I got a knife here."

"I'm not going to hit you. I'm going to hand you over to the police."

The man's eyes roved, looking for a way of escape; then rested, as if fascinated, on the glowing hearth.

"What's ten pounds?" he said suddenly; "you'd never ha' missed it."

Granter smiled.

"You don't seem to realise, my friend, that blackmail is the most devilish crime a man can commit." And he crossed over to the telephone.

The man's eyes, dark, restless, violent, and yet hungry, began to shift up and down the building of a man before him.

"No," he said suddenly, with a sort of pathos, "don't do that, guv'nor!"

The look of his eyes, or the tone of his voice, affected Granter.

"But if I don't," he said slowly, "you'll be

blackmailing the next person you meet. You're as dangerous as a viper."

The man's lips quivered; he covered them with his hand, and said from behind it:

"I'm a man like yourself. I'm down and out—that's all. Look at me!"

Granter's glance dwelt on the trembling hand. "Yes, but you fellows destroy all belief in human nature," he said vehemently.

"See 'ere, guv'nor; you try livin' like me—you try it! My Gawd! You try my life these last six months—cadgin' and crawlin' for a job!" He made a deep sound. "A man 'oo's done 'is bit, too. Wot life is it? A stinkin' life, not fit for a dawg, let alone a 'uman bein'. An' when I see a great big chap like you, beggin' your pardon, mister, well fed, with everything to 'is 'and—it was regular askin' for it. It come over me, it did."

"No, no," said Granter grimly; "that won't do. It couldn't have been sudden. You calculated—you concocted this. Blackmail is sheer filthy cold-blooded blackguardism. You don't care two straws whom you hurt, whose lives you wreck, what faiths you destroy." And he put his hand on the receiver.

The man squirmed.

"Steady on, guv'nor! I've gotta find food. I've

gotta find clothes. I can't live on air. I can't go naked."

Granter stood motionless, while the man's voice continued to travel to him across the cosy room.

"Give us a chawnce, guv'nor! Ah! give us a chawnce! You can't understand my temptations. Don't have the police to me. I won't do this again —give you me word—so 'elp me! I've got it in the neck. Let me go, guv'nor!"

In Granter, motionless as the flats he lived in, a heavy struggle was in progress—not between duty and pity, but between revengeful anger and a sort of horror at using the strength of prosperity against so broken a wretch.

"Let me go, mister!" came the hoarse voice again. "Be a sport!"

Granter dropped the receiver and unlocked the door.

"All right; you can go."

The man crossed swiftly.

"Christ!" he said; "good luck! And as to the lady—I take it back. I never see 'er. It's all me eye."

He was across the hall and gone before Granter could decide what to say; the scurrying shuffle of his footsteps down the stairs died away. 'And as to the lady—I take it back. I never see 'er. It's

all me eye!' Good God! The scoundrel, having failed with him, had been trying to blackmail his wife—his wife, who had laughed at his fidelity—his wife, who had looked—frightened! 'All me eye!' Her face started up before Granter—*scared* under its powder, with a mask drawn over it. And he had let that scoundrel go! . . . But why—scared? Blackmail—of all poisonous human actions! . . . Why scared? . . . What now . . .!

1921.

THE BROKEN BOOT

THE actor, Gilbert Caister, who had been 'out' for six months, emerged from his East Coast seaside lodging about noon in the day, after the opening of 'Shooting the Rapids,' on tour, in which he was playing Dr. Dominick in the last act. A salary of four pounds a week would not, he was conscious, remake his fortunes, but a certain jauntiness had returned to the gait and manner of one employed again at last.

Fixing his monocle, he stopped before a fishmonger's and, with a faint smile on his face, regarded a lobster. Ages since he had eaten a lobster! One could long for a lobster without paying, but the pleasure was not solid enough to detain him. He moved upstreet and stopped again, before a tailor's window. Together with the actual tweeds, in which he could so easily fancy himself refitted, he could see a reflection of himself, in the faded brown suit wangled out of the production of 'Marmaduke Mandeville' the year before the war. The sunlight in this damned town was very strong, very hard on seams and buttonholes, on

knees and elbows! Yet he received the ghost of æsthetic pleasure from the reflected elegance of a man long fed only twice a day, of an eyeglass well rimmed out from a soft brown eye, of a velour hat salved from the production of 'Educating Simon' in 1912; and, in front of the window he removed that hat, for under it was his new phenomenon, not yet quite evaluated, his *mêche blanche*. Was it an asset, or the beginning of the end? It reclined backwards on the right side, conspicuous in his dark hair, above that shadowy face always interesting to Gilbert Caister. They said it came from atrophy of the—er—something nerve, an effect of the war, or of under-nourished tissue. Rather distinguished, perhaps, but——!

He walked on, and became conscious that he had passed a face he knew. Turning, he saw it also turned on a short and dapper figure—a face rosy, bright, round, with an air of cherubic knowledge, as of a getter-up of amateur theatricals.

Bryce-Green, by George!

"Caister? It is! Haven't seen you since you left the old camp. Remember what sport we had over 'Gotta Grampus'? By Jove! I am glad to see you. Doing anything with yourself? Come and have lunch with me."

Bryce-Green, the wealthy patron, the moving

spirit of entertainment in that South Coast convalescent camp. And, drawling slightly, Caister answered:

"Shall be delighted." But within him something did not drawl: 'By God, you're going to have a feed, my boy!'

And — elegantly threadbare, roundabout and dapper—the two walked side by side.

"Know this place? Let's go in here! Phyllis, cocktails for my friend Mr. Caister and myself, and caviare on biscuits. Mr. Caister is playing here! you must go and see him."

The girl who served the cocktails and the caviare looked up at Caister with interested blue eyes. Precious! He had been 'out' for six months!

"Nothing of a part," he drawled; "took it to fill a gap." And below his waistcoat the gap echoed: 'Yes, and it'll take some filling.'

"Bring your cocktail along, Caister; we'll go into the little further room, there'll be nobody there. What shall we have—a lobstah?"

And Caister murmured: "I love lobstahs."

"Very fine and large here. And how are you, Caister? So awfully glad to see you—only real actor we had."

"Thanks," said Caister, "I'm all right." And

he thought: 'He's a damned amateur, but a nice little man.'

"Sit here. Waiter, bring us a good big lobstah and a salad; and then—er—a small fillet of beef with potatoes fried crisp, and a bottle of my special hock. Ah! and a rum omelette—plenty of rum and sugah. Twig?"

And Caister thought: 'Thank God, I do.'

They had sat down opposite each other at one of two small tables in the little recessed room.

"Luck!" said Bryce-Green.

"Luck!" replied Caister; and the cocktail trickling down him echoed: 'Luck!'

"And what do you think of the state of the drama?" Oh! ho! A question after his own heart. Balancing his monocle by a sweetish smile on the opposite side of his mouth, Caister drawled his answer: "Quite too bally awful!"

"H'm! Yes," said Bryce-Green; "nobody with any genius, is there?"

And Caister thought: 'Nobody with any money.'

"Have you been playing anything great? You were so awfully good in 'Gotta Grampus'!"

"Nothing particular. I've been—er—rather slack." And with their feel around his waist his trousers seemed to echo: 'Slack!'

"Ah!" said Bryce-Green. "Here we are! Do you like claws?"

"Tha-a-nks. Anything!" To eat—until warned by the pressure of his waist against his trousers! Huh! What a feast! And what a flow of his own tongue suddenly released—on drama, music, art; mellow and critical, stimulated by the round eyes and interjections of his little provincial host.

"By Jove, Caister! You've got a *mêche blanche*. Never noticed. I'm awfully interested in *mêches blanches*. Don't think me too frightfully rude—but did it come suddenly?"

"No, gradually."

"And how do you account for it?"

'Try starvation,' trembled on Caister's lips.

"I don't."

"I think it's ripping. Have some more omelette? I often wish I'd gone on the regular stage myself. Must be a topping life, if one has talent, like you."

Topping?

"Have a cigar. Waiter! Coffee and cigars. I shall come and see you to-night. Suppose you'll be here a week?"

Topping! The laughter and applause—"Mr. Caister's rendering left nothing to be desired; its —— and its —— are in the true spirit of ——!"

Silence recalled him from his rings of smoke. Bryce-Green was sitting, with cigar held out and mouth a little open, and bright eyes round as pebbles, fixed—fixed on some object near the floor, past the corner of the tablecloth. Had he burnt his mouth? The eyelids fluttered; he looked at Caister, licked his lips like a dog, nervously, and said:

"I say, old chap, don't think me a beast, but are you at all—er—er—rocky? I mean—if I can be of any service, don't hesitate! Old acquaintance, don't you know, and all that——"

His eyes rolled out again towards the object, and Caister followed them. Out there above the carpet he saw it—his own boot. It dangled, because his knees were crossed, six inches off the ground—split—right across, twice, between lace and toecap. Quite! He knew it. A boot left him from the rôle of Bertie Carstairs, in 'The Dupe,' just before the war. Good boots. His only pair, except the boots of Dr. Dominick, which he was nursing. And from the boot he looked back at Bryce-Green, sleek and concerned. A drop, black when it left his heart, suffused his eye behind the monocle; his smile curled bitterly; he said:

"Not at all, thanks! Why?"

"Oh! n-n-nothing. It just occurred to me." His eyes—but Caister had withdrawn the boot. Bryce-Green paid the bill and rose.

"Old chap, if you'll excuse me; engagement at half-past two. So awf'ly glad to have seen you. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said Caister. "And thanks!"

He was alone. And, chin on hand, he stared through his monocle into an empty coffee cup. Alone with his heart, his boot, his life to come. . . . 'And what have you been in lately, Mr. Caister?' 'Nothing very much lately. Of course I've played almost everything.' 'Quite so. Perhaps you'll leave your address; can't say anything definite, I'm afraid.' 'I—I should—er—be willing to rehearse on approval; or—if I could read the part?' 'Thank you, afraid we haven't got as far as that.' 'No? Quite! Well, I shall hear from you, perhaps.' And Caister could see his own eyes looking at the manager. God! What a look. . . . A topping life! A dog's life! Cadging—cadging—cadging for work! A life of draughty waiting, of concealed beggary, of terrible depressions, of want of food!

The waiter came skating round as if he desired to clear. Must go! Two young women had come in and were sitting at the other table between him and the door. He saw them look at him, and his sharpened senses caught the whisper:

"Sure—in the last act. Don't you see his *mêche blanche?*"

"Oh! yes—of course! Isn't it—wasn't he——!"

Caister straightened his back; his smile crept out, he fixed his monocle. They had spotted his Dr. Dominick!

"If you've quite finished, sir, may I clear?"

"Certainly. I'm going." He gathered himself and rose. The young women were gazing up. Elegant, with faint smile, he passed them close, managing—so that they could not see—his broken boot.

1922.

STROKE OF LIGHTNING

THIS was before the war, and conditions were such that the tragedies and comedies of private lives seemed still to have importance.

I had not seen my friend Frank Weymouth for some years before coming across him and his wife that Christmas at the big hotel in Heliopolis. He was always a sunny fellow with a spilt-wine look about him, which not even a house-mastership at a Public School had been able to overcome; his wife, whom I had only met twice before, surprised me a little. I remembered a quiet, rather dark little person with a doubting eye; but this was a very kitten of a woman, brimful of mischief and chaff, and always on the go—reaction, no doubt, from the enforced decorum of a house where she was foster-mother of forty boys, in an atmosphere of being under glass and the scrutiny of intensive propriety. In our Egyptian hotel, with its soft, clever Berberine servants, its huge hall, palm-garden, and cosmopolitan guests, its golf-course with little dark, scurrying Arab caddies and the

desert at its doors, Jessie Weymouth frolicked and rolled her large dark eyes, scratched and caressed us with her little paws. Life had suddenly got into her, and left its tail outside for her to chase. She dragged us all along in her gay pursuit of it; Weymouth smilingly acquiesced in her outrageous 'goings-on.' He knew, I suppose, that she was devoted to him, and her bark no bite. His 'term' had been a hard one; he was in a mood of lying back, physically run down, mentally flattened out. To soak in idleness and the sun was all he seemed to care about.

I forget who first conceived the notion of our desert trip, but it was Jessie Weymouth who fostered it. The Weymouths were not rich, and a desert trip costs money. They, myself, and a certain Breconridge couple had agreed to combine, when the Breconridges were suddenly summoned home by their daughter's illness. Jessie Weymouth danced with disappointment. "I shall die if we don't go now," she cried. "We simply must scare up somebody."

We scared up the Radolins, an Austrian couple in our hotel whom we had been meeting casually after dinner. He was a Count, in a bank at Constantinople, and she, I think, the daughter of a Viennese painter. They used to interest me from

being so very much the antithesis of the Weymouths. He was making the most of his holiday, dancing, playing golf, riding; while she seemed extraordinarily listless, pale, and, as it were, dragged along by her lively husband. I would notice her lounging alone in the gorgeous hall, gazing apparently at nothing. I could not make up my mind about her looks. Her figure was admirable, so were her eyes—ice-green with dark lashes. But that air of tired indifference seemed to spoil her face. I remember doubting whether it were not going to spoil our trip. But Jessie Weymouth could not be denied, and Radolin, we all admitted, was good company.

We started, then, from Mena House, like all desert excursionists, on New Year's Day. We had only a fortnight before us, for the Weymouths were due back in England on the twentieth.

Our dragoman was a merry scoundrel by disposition and an Algerian Bedouin by race. Besides him we had twelve Arabs, a Greek cook, seven camels, four donkeys, and five tents. We took the usual route for the Fayoum. I remember our start so well. In front, Jessie Weymouth on a silver-grey donkey, and our scoundrel on his pet camel. Then Radolin, Weymouth, and I on the other three donkeys, and Hélène Radolin perched

up, remote and swaying, on the other riding-camel. The pack-camels had gone on ahead. All day we dawdled along, following the river towards Samara, where we camped at a due distance from that evil-smelling village. I had the middle tent, Weymouths to my right, Radolins to my left. Everything was well done by our merry dragoman, and dinner, thanks to him, Jessie Weymouth, and Radolin, a lively feast. Still, these first three days, skirting cultivation, were disappointing. But on the fourth we were well out on the lonely sands, and the desert air had begun to go to our heads. That night we camped among bare hills under a wonderful starry sky, cold and clear as crystal. Our scoundrel surpassed himself at dinner; Jessie Weymouth and Radolin were madcaps; Weymouth his old sunny self. Only Hélène Radolin preserved her languor; not offensively, but as though she had lost the habit of gaiety. That night I made up my mind, however, that she really was a beautiful woman. The long days in the sun had given her colour, taken the tired look out of her face, and at least twice during the evening I caught Weymouth's eyes fixed on her as if he, too, had made that discovery.

The pranks of Jessie Weymouth and Radolin reached their limit at dinner, and they finished by

rushing out into the night to the top of a neighbouring hillock.

Sitting in my tent doorway, counting the stars, I was joined by our dragoman. The fellow had been in England and knew about Western freedom and the manners of our women.

"She certainly is a good one, Mrs. Weymut," he said to me. "Mr. Weymut a very quiet man. I think he will be tired of her flirts, but he never say nothing—too b——y gentle. The Count he is a good one too, but the Countess—ah! she made of ice! We get some fresh fruit to-morrow at the Fayoum."

He went on to his men, two hundred yards away among the camels.

It was wonderfully silent. The light from stars and a half-moon powdered the sands; no wind at all, yet deliciously cold—the desert in good mood; no influence quite so thrilling to pulses, yet so cooling to fevers; no sound, no movement in all the night.

"Isn't it heavenly? Good-night."

Hélène Radolin was passing me in her fur. She went into her tent. I sat on, smoking. And presently, outside the dining-tent, I saw Weymouth, his head thrown back, drawing in deep breaths. By the light of the lantern over the tent

door he had a look as if inspired by a curious happy wonder. Then he, too, went to his tent. Ten minutes later the madcaps returned, Mrs. Weymouth in front, very quiet; her face, indeed, wore a rather mortified expression, as if she had fallen a little in her own estimation. They went into their tents, and I heard voices a moment to left and right; then the stillness and the powdering light enveloped all.

Next day, bored with donkey riding, I walked with the Arabs and saw little of my companions. Weymouth and the Countess, I think, were on the two riding-camels, Radolin and Mrs. Weymouth on their donkeys. We came to the edge of the Fayoum about five o'clock. That camping-ground was narrow. In tents, when jammed together, one can't avoid hearing at least the tone of neighbouring talk, and I was struck by a certain acrimony in the Weymouth tent. Jessie Weymouth seemed complaining that Frank hadn't spoken to her all day.

"I suppose," she said, "you didn't like my running out with Countie last night?"

Weymouth's voice, quite good-humoured, answered:

"Oh, not a bit, why should I mind?"

By the ensuing silence I seemed to realise that

Jessie Weymouth was disappointed. Perhaps I hadn't really a feeling of suspense that evening, but, in reminiscence, it seems to me I had. Dinner was certainly a disharmonic feast: little Mrs. Weymouth audacious and rueful, Weymouth and the Countess subdued, Radolin artificial, our scoundrel and myself had to make the running. That fellow was needle-sharp, though not always correct in his conclusions.

"Mrs. Weymut got a fly in her little eye," he said to me as I was turning in. "I make it all right to-morrow. I get a dancer at Sennourès. Oho, she is a good one! She make the married couples 'appy. We get some fresh eggs too."

Severe silence in the tents to right and left that night.

A whole day's travelling through the crops of the Fayoum brought us to the camping-ground outside Sennourès, among a grove of palm-trees—charming spot, but lacking the clear, cold spirituality of the desert night.

The dancer was certainly 'a good one.' What a baggage! All lithe, supple enticement, and jangle of shivering beads! The excitement of the Arabs, the shocked, goggling eyes of Jessie Weymouth—quite a little Puritan when it came to the point—the laughter of our scoundrel. Hélène

Radolin's aloofness, which kept even that daughter of Egypt in her place, were what impressed me during the performance.

Towards the end the Egyptian made a dead set at Weymouth, and, getting nothing out of him except his smile, became quite cross. Leaning down to our scoundrel and slinking her eyes round at the Countess, she murmured something malicious. Our laughing scoundrel patted her, and we broke up. In ten minutes our camp was empty—dancer, Arabs, all had gone off to the village. I went out and stood in darkness among the palm-trees, listening to the shivering of their leaves.

In the dining-tent Radolin was playing the guitar—a soothing sound after the vibrant Arab music. Presently I saw Weymouth come out. He stood under the lamp at the entrance, looking back; his face was fully lighted for me, but invisible, I think, to those within. I can still see the look on it. Adoration incarnate!

'Hallo!' I thought, 'what's this?' And just then Hélène Radolin came out too. She passed him quietly; he did not attempt to speak or follow; but she saw. Oh, yes, she saw; then vanished into her tent. And Weymouth stood, rooted, as if struck by lightning, while, on and on, behind

him rose the thrum of that guitar and all around us the shivering of the palm-leaves in a gusty breeze.

Quite the custom, I believe, in these days to laugh at this sort of thing—at such sudden leaps of an irresponsible force; to suggest that they are old-fashioned, overrated—literary, in fact. The equality of the sexes—they say—the tendency of women towards brains and trousers, have diminished Venus; and yet, I fancy what happened to my friend Weymouth may still happen to young gentlemen who talk as if love had no fevers and no proprietary instincts; as if, when you burn for a woman, you are willing to leave her to another, or share her with him without fuss. Of course there are men who have no blood in their veins; but my friend Weymouth unfortunately had—not for nothing was the sunny, spilt-wine look about his hair and cheeks and dark-blue eyes.

For the rest of our desert trip the situation hopelessly promoted that adoration. Little Jessie Weymouth certainly did her best to help. She was the only one of us blind to what had happened. Her perceptions, you see, were blunted by the life of strenuous duty which she and Weymouth led in term time, and by the customary exhaustion of

her husband during the holidays. She could not imagine him otherwise than sober. But now—if ever a man were drunk! The thing became so patent that it was quite painful to see her continued blindness. Not till sunset of the second day, with the Fayoum behind us, in our high camp on the desert's edge, did she appreciate tragedy. *Those two* were sitting in camp-chairs close together, watching the sun go down. The Arabs, presented with a ram to soothe their grief at abandoning the joys of the Fayoum, were noisily preparing the animal to the idea of being eaten. Our scoundrel and Radolin were absent; I was sketching; Jessie Weymouth lying down in her tent. Those two were alone—their faces turned towards each other, their hands, perhaps, touching. A strange violet was in the light over the bare hills; how much they saw of it I know not, nor what they were saying to each other, when Jessie Weymouth came out of her tent, stretching and yawning, and, like the kitten she was, went stealing up behind, to startle them. Three yards away, unseen, unheard, I saw her stop. Her lips opened, her eyes went wide with amazement. Suddenly she covered them with her hands, turned round, and stole back into her tent.

Five minutes later out she came again, with

bright, hard spots of colour in her cheeks. I saw her run up to them, her feverish attempts at gaiety; and I saw, too, that to them she simply did not exist. We none of us existed for them. They had found a world of their own, and we were shadows in the unreal world which they had left. You know the pink-flowered daphne, the scent of whose blossoms is very sweet, heavy, and slightly poisonous; sniff it too much and a kind of feverish fire will seize you. Those two had sniffed the daphne!

Walls have a singular value for civilised beings. In my thin tent between the thin tents of those two couples, prevented by lack of walls from any outlet to their feelings, I seemed to hear the smothered reproaches, the smothered longings. It was the silence of those two suddenly stricken lovers that was so impressive. I, literally, did not dare to speak to Weymouth while we were all mixed up like that. This English schoolmaster had lost, as if by magic, all power of seeing himself as others saw him. Not that those two 'carried on'—nothing so normal; they just seemed to have stepped into quiet oblivion of everything but each other.

Even our scoundrel was puzzled. "In my house, when my wife behave bad, I beat her," he said to

me; "when I behave bad she scratch my face." But there it was—we had no walls; Hélène Radolin could not be beaten, Weymouth could not have his face scratched—most awkward.

Things come to an end, and I never breathed more freely than when Mena House delivered us from that frightful close companionship.

As if by common consent, we dined at separate tables. After dinner I said to Weymouth:

"Come up and see the Sphinx by moonlight."

He came, still in his dream. We reached the Sphinx in silence, and sat down over against her on the sand. At last I said:

"What are you going to do now, old man?"

"I can't leave her." It was as if we had discussed the thing a dozen times already.

"But you have to be back on the twentieth?"

"I know."

"My dear fellow, it's ruination. And Jessie?"

"She must do what she likes."

"This is madness, Frank!"

"Perhaps. I can't go; that's all."

"What about *her?*"

"I don't know. I only know that where she goes I must."

I just sat staring at the blunt shadow of the Sphinx's broken profile on the moonlit sand. The

strange, actionless, desert love-dream was at an end! Something definite—horrible, perhaps—must happen now! And I stammered out:

"For God's sake, old boy, think of your wife, your work, yourself—be reasonable! It isn't worth it, really!"

"Perhaps not. This has nothing to do with reason."

From a master at an English Public School the remark appeared to me fantastic. And, suddenly, he got up, as if he had been bitten. He was realising suddenly the difference that walls make. His face had a tortured look. The woman he loved, walled up with the man she had married! Behind us the desert, hundreds of miles of clean, savage sand, and in it we humans—tame and spiritual! Before us walls, and we humans—savage, carnal again! Queer! I doubt if he saw the irony; but he left me sitting there and went hurrying back to the hotel.

I stayed on a little with the riddle of the Ages, feeling it simple compared with this riddle of the moment. Then I followed him down. Would it resolve itself in terms of l. s. d.? After all, these four people had to live—could they afford to play fast and loose with the realities? Hélène Radolin had no money; Weymouth his mastership and a

few hundreds saved; Jessie Weymouth a retired Colonel for a father; Radolin his banking partnership.

A night of walls had its effect. Radolin took his wife back to Heliopolis next day. The Weymouths remained at Mena House; in three days they were due to sail.

I well remember thinking: 'There, you see, it doesn't do to exaggerate. This was a desert mirage and will pass like one. People are *not* struck by lightning!' But in a mood of morbid curiosity I went out to Heliopolis.

In the tramcar on the way I felt a sort of disappointment — Hélène Radolin was a Roman Catholic, Frank Weymouth an English gentleman. The two facts put a stopper on what I wanted stopped. Yet we all have a sneaking love for the romantic, or—shall we say?—dramatic.

Well! The Radolins were gone. They had started that morning for Constantinople. In the Oriental hall where all this had begun I sat, browsing over my Turkish coffee, seeing again my friend Weymouth, languid and inert; his little wife's flirtatious liveliness; Radolin so debonair; Hélène Radolin, silent, her ice-green eyes slightly reddened in the lids as if she had been crying. The white-garbed Berberines slipped by; Greek

gentlemen entertained their dubious ladies; Germans raised a guttural racket; the orchestra twanged out the latest tango. Nothing was changed but those figures of my vision. And suddenly Weymouth materialised—standing as if lost, just where the lobby opened into the hall. From his face it was clear to me that he knew the Radolins were gone; before I could join him he went out hastily. I am sorry now that I did not follow.

That evening at Mena House I was just beginning to undress when Jessie Weymouth tapped on my door.

"Have you seen Frank?"

I told her where I had seen him in the afternoon.

"That woman!" she cried. "He's not come back."

I assured her that the Radolins were gone back home. She stared at me and began to cry. She cried and cried, and I did not try to stop her. She was not only desolate and miserable, but bitter and angry. 'So long as she can be angry,' I thought, 'she'll get over it. One is not angry under a death-blow.'

At last she had cried her misery out, but not her anger or dismay. What was she to do? I tried to persuade her that Frank would turn up in time for them to start to-morrow evening. He was

probably trying to work the thing out of his system; she must look on it as a fever, a kind of illness. She laughed wildly, scornfully, and went out.

Weymouth did not turn up, but the morning brought me a letter, enclosing a cheque for three hundred pounds, a note to his wife, and a sealed envelope addressed to the headmaster of his Public School.

The letter to me ran as follows:

"OLD MAN,

"I admit that I am behaving like a cad; but it's either this or the sweet waters of oblivion; and there's less scandal this way. I have made up some story for my chief; please post it. The cheque is for all my substance except some fifty pounds. Take care of it for my wife; she'll get another five hundred, about, out of the turnover of our house. She will go to her father, no doubt, and forget me, I hope. Do, please, like a good fellow, see her safely on board. It's not likely that I shall ever come back to England. The future is quite dark, but where *she* is, there I must be. Poste restante Constantinople will find me, so far as I know at present. Good-bye!

"Your affectionate

"F. W."

I did see Jessie Weymouth on board her ship, and a precious business it was.

A week later I, too, started for Constantinople, partly because I had promised Mrs. Weymouth,

partly because I could not reconcile myself to the vision of my friend in the grip of his passion, without a job, almost without money.

The Radolins inhabited an old house on the far shore almost opposite the Rumeli Hissar. I called on them without warning, and found Hélène Radolin alone. In a room all Turkish stuffs and shadowy lights, she looked very different from her desert self. She had regained her pale languor, but her face had a definite spirit, lacking when I first saw her. She spoke quite freely.

"I love him; but it is madness. I have tried to send him away; he will not go. You see, I am a Catholic; my religion means much to me. I must not go away with him. Take him back to England with you; I cannot bear to see him ruin his life like this for me."

I confess to looking at her with the wonder whether it was religion or the lack of l. s. d.

"Ah!" she said. "You don't understand; you think I am afraid of poverty with him. No! I am afraid of losing my soul, and his."

The way she said that was extraordinarily impressive. I asked her if she saw him.

"Yes; he comes. I have to let him. I cannot bear the look on his face when I say 'No.'" She gave me his address.

He had a garret in a little Greek hotel, just

above Galata—a ramshackle place, chosen for its cheapness. He did not seem surprised to see me. But I was startled. His face, shrunken and lined, had a bitter, burnt-up look, which deepened the set and colour of his eyes till they looked almost black. A long bout of disease will produce just that effect.

"If she didn't love me," he said, "I could bear it. But she does. Well! So long as I can see her I shall stand it; and she'll come—she'll come to me at last."

I repeated her words to me; I spoke of his wife, of England—no memory, no allusion, no appeal touched him.

I stayed a month and saw him nearly every day; I did not move him by one jot. At the end of that month I should never have known him for the Frank Weymouth who had started out with us from Mena House on New Year's Day. Changed! He was! I had managed to get him a teaching job through a man I knew at the Embassy—a poor enough job—a bare subsistence. And, watching my friend day by day, I began to have a feeling of hatred for that woman. Yet I knew that her refusal to indulge their passion was truly religious. She really did see her lost soul and his, whirling entwined through purgatory, like the souls

of Paola and Francesca in Watts' picture. Call it superstition, or what you will, her scruples were entirely genuine, and, from a certain point of view, quite laudable.

As for Radolin, he took it all precisely as if there were nothing to take; smooth and debonair as ever—a little harder about the mouth and eyes, and that was all.

The morning before I went home I made my way once more up the evil-smelling stairs to my friend's garret. He was standing at the window, looking down over the bridge—that tragic bridge of Galata where the blind and halt used to trade, perhaps still trade, the sight of their misfortunes. We stood there side by side.

"Frank," I said, "this can't go on! Do you ever look at yourself in the glass?"

No smile can be so bitter as a smile that used to be sunny.

"So long as I can see her I shall last out."

"You surely don't want a woman to feel she's lost her soul, and is making you lose yours? She's perfectly sincere in that."

"I know. I've given up asking. So long as I can see her, that's all."

It was mania!

That afternoon I took a boat over to the

Radolins. It was April—the first real day of spring, balmy and warm. The Judas-trees of the Rumeli Hissar were budding, the sun colouring the water with tints of opal; and all the strange city of mosques and minarets, Western commerce and Oriental beggary, was wonderfully living under that first spring sun. I brought my boat up to the Radolins' landing-stage, and got out. I mounted the steps, greened over by the wash of the water, and entered their little garden courtyard. I had never come this way before, and stood for a moment looking through the mimosas and bougainvillæas for a door that would satisfy formality. There was a grille to the left, but to reach it I would have to pass in front of the wide ground-floor window, whence I had sometimes looked out over the water to the Rumeli Hissar. My shoes made no noise on the marble path, but what I saw in the room stopped me from trying to pass.

Hélène Radolin was sitting perfectly still in a low chair sideways to the window, her hands on her lap, her eyes fixed on the tiled floor, where a streak of sunlight fell. In the curve of her grand piano, resting his elbows on it, Weymouth was leaning back, equally still, gazing down at her. That was all. But the impression I received of life arrested, of frozen lava, was in a way terrible.

I stole back down the steps into my boat, and out on to the opal-tinted waters.

I have nothing more to tell you of this business. The war came down on us all soon after. Rumours I have heard, but I know nothing, as they say, of my own knowledge. Yet it has seemed to me worth while to set down this record of a 'stroke of lightning' in days when people laugh at such absurdities.

1921.

VIRTUE

HAROLD MELLESH, minor clerk in an accident assurance society, having occasion to be present at a certain police court to give evidence in the matter of a smashed car, stood riveted by manifestations of the law entirely new to him. His eyes, blue and rather like those of a baby, were opened very widely, his ingenuous forehead wrinkled, his curly hair was moving on his scalp, his fists involuntarily clenching his straw hat. He had seen four ladies of the town dealt with—three 'jugged,' and one fined—before his sensations reached their climax. Perhaps she was prettier than the others, certainly younger, and she was crying.

"First time you've been here—two pounds, and ten shillings costs."

"But I haven't any money, sir."

"Very well—fourteen days."

Tears streaking the remains of powder; a queer little sound—the sensations within young Mellesh simmered like a kettle coming to the boil. He touched a dark blue sleeve in front of him.

"Here," he said, "I'll pay her fine."

He felt the glance of the policeman running over him like a chilly insect.

"Friend of yours?"

"No."

"I shouldn't, then. She'll be here again within the month."

The girl was passing, he saw the swallowing movement of her throat and said with desperation:

"I don't care. I'll pay it."

The blue man's glance crept about him clammily.

"Come with me, then."

Young Mellesh followed him out.

"Here," said his policeman to the one in charge of the girl, "this gentleman'll pay the fine."

Conscious of a confusion of glances, of his own cheeks reddening furiously, young Mellesh brought out his money—just two pounds fifteen; and, handing over the two pounds ten, he thought, 'My hat! What would Alice say?'

He heard the girl's gasped out "Ow! Thank you!" his policeman's muttered "Waste o' money!" and passed out into the street. Now that his feelings had given off that two pound ten's worth of steam he felt chilly and dazed, as if virtue had gone out of him. A voice behind him said:

"Thank you ever so much—it *was* kind of you."

Raising his straw hat he stood uncomfortably, to let her pass.

She pushed a card into his hand. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you; I'm very grateful."

"Not at all!" With a smile, confused like her own, he turned off towards his office.

All day, among his accidents, he felt uncertain. Had he been a fool; had he been a hero? Sometimes he thought: 'What brutes they are to those girls!' and sometimes: 'Don't know; suppose they must do something about it.' And he avoided considering how to explain the absence of two pounds ten shillings on which Alice had been reckoning. His soul was simple like the expressions on his face.

He reached home at the usual hour—six-thirty. His home was grey and small and had a little bit of green up Chalk Farm way, where the Tube made all things possible.

His wife, who had just put their baby daughter to bed, was sitting in the parlour darning his socks. She looked up—surely her forehead was rather like a knee!

"You wear your socks properly, Harold," she

said; "it's all I can do to mend this pair." Her eyes were china-blue, round like saucers; her voice had the monotony of one brought up to minimise emotion. A farmer's daughter, young Mellesh had become engaged to her during a holiday in Somerset. Pale himself, from office and the heat, he thought how pale she looked.

"The heat's dreadful, isn't it?" she said. "Sometimes I wish we'd never had baby. It does tie you in the evenings. I *am* looking forward to Whitsuntide, that I am."

Young Mellesh, tall and straggly, bent over and kissed her forehead. How on earth to let her know that he had 'blewed' their holiday? He was realising that he had done an awful thing. Perhaps—oh! surely—she would understand how he couldn't sit and see that girl 'jugged' before his eyes for want of it! But not until the end of their small supper did he say abruptly:

"I got quite upset this morning, Alice. Had to go down to the police court about that car smash I told you of, and afterwards I saw them run in a lot of those Piccadilly girls. It fair sickened me to see the way they treat them."

His wife looked up; her face was childlike.

"Why, what do they do to them?"

"Quod them for speakin' to men in the street."

"I s'pose they're up to no good."

Irritated by the matter-of-factness in her voice, he went on:

"They speak to 'em as if they were dirt."

"Well, aren't they?"

"They may be a loose lot, but so are the men."

"Men wouldn't be so loose if they weren't there."

"I suppose it's what you call a vicious circle;" and, pleased with his play on words, he added: "One or two of them were pretty."

His wife smiled; her smile had a natural teasing quality.

"They treat *them* better, I suppose?"

That was jolly cynical! and he blurted out:

"One, quite young, never there before, they gave her a fortnight just because she hadn't any money—I couldn't stick it; I paid her fine."

There was sweat on his forehead. His wife's face had gone quite pink.

"You paid? How much?"

He was on the point of saying: 'Ten shillings.' But something in his soul revolted. "Regular pill—two pound ten;" and he thought glumly: 'Oh! what a fool I've been!'

He did wish Alice wouldn't open her mouth like that, when nothing was coming out—made her look so silly! Her face puckered suddenly, then became

quite blank; he was moved as if he had hit or pinched her.

"Awfully sorry, Alice," he muttered, "never meant to—she—she cried."

"Course she cried! You fool, Harold!"

He got up, very much disturbed.

"Well, and what would *you* have done?"

"Me? Let her stew in her own juice, of course. It wasn't your affair."

She too had risen. He thrust his fingers through his hair. The girl's face, tear-streaked, confusedly pretty, had come up before him, her soft common grateful voice tickled his ears again. His wife turned her back. So! he was in for a fit of sulks. Well! No doubt he had deserved it.

"I dare say I *was* a fool," he muttered, "but I did think you'd understand how I felt when I saw her cry. Suppose it had been you!" From the toss of her head, he knew he had said something pretty fatal.

"Oh! So that's what you think of me!"

He grasped her shoulder.

"Of course I don't, Alice; don't be so silly!"

She shook off his hand.

"Whose money was it? Now baby and me'll get no holiday. And all because you see a slut crying."

Before he could answer she was gone. He had

an awful sense of having outraged justice. Given away her holiday—given his wife's holiday to a girl of the streets! Still, it was his own holiday, too; besides, he earned the money! He'd never wanted to give it to the girl; hadn't got anything for it! Suppose he'd put it into the offertory bag, would Alice have been in such a temper even if it was their holiday? He didn't see much difference. He sat down with knees apart, and elbows planted on them, staring at the peonies on the Brussels carpet paid for on the hire system. And all those feelings that rise in people living together, when they don't agree, swirled in his curly head, and troubled his candid eyes. If only the girl hadn't cried! She hadn't meant to cry; he could tell that by the sound of it. And who was the magistrate—he didn't look too like a saint; who was any man to treat her like that? Alice oughtn't—No! But suddenly, he saw Alice again bending over his socks—pale and tired with the heat—doing things for him or baby—and he had given away her holiday! No denying that! Compunction flooded him. He must go up and find her and try and make his peace—he would pawn his bicycle—she should have her holiday—she should!

He opened the door and listened. The little house was ominously quiet—only the outside even-

ing sounds from buses passing in the main road, from children playing on the doorsteps of the side street, from a man with a barrow of bananas. She must be up in the bedroom with baby! He mounted the steep whitewashed stairway. It wanted a carpet, and fresh paint; ah! and a lot of other things Alice wanted—you couldn't have everything at once on four pound ten a week—with the price of living what it was. But she ought to have remembered there were things he wanted too —yes, precious bad, and never thought of getting. The door of their bedroom was locked; he rattled the handle. She opened suddenly, and stood facing him on the little landing.

"I don't want you up here."

"Look here, Alice—this is rotten."

She closed the door behind her.

"It is! You go down again, I don't want you. Think I believe that about crying? I'd be ashamed, if I were you!"

Ashamed! He might have been too soft, but why ashamed?

"Think I don't know what men are like? You can just go to your street girl, if she's so pretty!" She stood hard and stiff against the door, with red spots in her cheeks. She almost made him feel a villain—such conviction in her body.

"Alice! Good Lord! You must be crazy! I've done nothing!"

"But you'd like to. Go along! I don't want you!"

The stabbing stare of her blue eyes, the muffled energy of her voice, the bitterness about her mouth all made a fellow feel—well, that he knew nothing about anything—coming from one's wife like that! He leaned back against the wall.

"Well, I'm damned!" was all he could get out.

"D'you mean to say she didn't ask you?"

The insides of his hands grew wet. The girl's card in his pocket!

"Well, if you like to be a cat I can't help it. What d'you take me for?"

"Giving your own child's money to a dirty slut! You owed it—that's what it was—or will be. Go on with you; don't stand there!"

He had a nasty longing to smite her on the mouth—it looked so bitter. "Well," he said slowly, "now I understand."

Yes, that was it—she was all of a piece with something, with that police court, with the tone of the men's voices, with something unsparing, hard and righteous, which came down sharp on people.

"I thought—I think you might——" he stammered.

"Ugh!" The sound exasperated him so, that he turned to go downstairs.

"You whited sepulchre!"

The door clicked before he could answer the odd insult; he heard the key turned. Idiotic! The little landing seemed too small to hold his feelings. Would he ever have been such an ass as to say a word to Alice, if he *had* done it? Why! He had never even thought of doing anything!

Giddy from chagrin he ran downstairs, and, clawing his straw hat from the rack, went out. The streets were malodorous from London fug—fried fish, petrol, hot dirty people; he strode along troubled, his eyes very rueful. So this was what he was really married to—this—this! It was like being married to that police court! It wasn't human—no, it wasn't—to be so suspicious and virtuous as all that! What was the use of being decent and straight, if this was all you got for it? Someone touched him on the shoulder.

"Mister, you've been standing against something; you're all white behind—let me give you a brush."

He stood confused, while a stout fair man smote his back up and down with a large flat hand.

Whited sepulchre! A bubble of rage rose to his lips. All right! She should see! He felt for the girl's card, and was suddenly amazed to find that he had no need to look at it—he remembered the address! Not far off, on the other side of the Euston Road! That was funny—had he been looking at it without realising? They said you had a subconscious mind. Well, what about it? No, it was his conscious mind that was going to serve Alice out! He had reached the Euston Road. Crossing it, he began to feel a queer pleasurable weakness in the legs. By this he knew that he was going to do wrong. He was not going to visit the girl just to serve his wife out, but because the prospect was——! That was bad—bad; it would put Alice in the right! He stood still at the corner of a narrow square, with a strip of garden, and railings round it. He leaned against those railings, his eyes searching the trees. He had always been quite straight with his wife—it was she who had put the idea into his head. And yet his legs being pleasurably weak seemed in an odd way to excuse her. It was like his doubt whether they hadn't to do something about it at the police court. Barring Alice—barring the police court—where would he—would any man be? Without virtue, entirely without virtue. A pigeon in the garden cooed.

"Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you." It had sounded genuine—really grateful. And the girl had looked—not worse than anybody else! If Alice had been sympathetic about it he would never have thought of her again; that is—well——! The doubt set his legs in motion. He was a married man, and that was all about it! But he looked across at the numbers on the houses. Twenty-seven! Yes, there it was! A bloom of lilac brushed his face. The scent jerked him suddenly back to the farm in Somerset, and he and Alice courting. Alice—not the Alice on the landing! He scrutinised the shabby house, and suddenly went hot all over. Suppose he went in there—what would that girl think? That he had paid her fine because——! But that wasn't it at all—oh! no—he wasn't a squirt like that! He turned his face away, and walked on fast and far.

The signs were lit above the theatres; traffic was scanty, the streets a long dawdle of what vehicles and humans were about. He came to Leicester Square and sat down on a bench. The lights all round him brightened slowly under the dusk—theatre lights, street lamps. And the pity of things smote him, sitting there. So much of everything; and one got so little of anything! Adding figures up all day, going home to Alice—that was

life! Well, it wasn't so bad when Alice was nice to him. But—crikey!—what one missed! That book about the South Sea Islands—places, peoples, sights, sounds, scents, all over the world! Four pound ten a week, a wife, a baby! Well, you couldn't have things both ways—but had he got them either way? Not with the Alice on the landing!

Ah! Well! Poor Alice; jolly hard on her to miss her holiday! But she might have given him the chance to tell her that he would pawn his bicycle. Or was it all a bad dream? Had he ever really been in the police court, seen them herding those girls to prison—girls who did what they did because—well, like himself, they had missed too much. They'd catch a fresh lot to-night. What a fool he'd been to pay that fine!

'Glad I didn't go into that girl's house, anyway,' he thought. 'I would have felt a scum!' The only decent thing about it all had been her look when she said: "Ow! thank you!" That gave him a little feeling of warmth even now; and then—it, too, chilled away. Nothing for it! When he had done sitting there, he must go home! If Alice had thought him a wrong-un before, what would she think when he returned? Well, there it was! The milk was spilt! But he did wish she hadn't got such a virtue on her.

The sky deepened and darkened, the lights stared white; the square garden with its flower-beds seemed all cut out and stiff—like scenery on a stage. Must go back and 'stick' it! No good to worry!

He got up from the bench, and gave himself a shake. His eyes, turned towards the lights of the Alhambra, were round, candid, decent, like the eyes of a baby.

1922.

CONSCIENCE

TAGGART sat up. The scoop under the ranger's fence, cannily selected for his sleeping place, was overhung by branches, and the birds of Hyde Park were at matins already. His watch had gone the way of his other belongings during the last three months, and he could only assume from the meagre light that it was but little after dawn. He was not grateful to the birds; he would be hungry long before a breakfast coming from he hardly knew where. But he listened to them with interest. This was the first night he had passed in the open, and, like all amateurs, he felt a kind of triumph at having achieved vagrancy in spite of the law, the ranger, and the dew. He was a Northumbrian, too, and his 'tail still up,' as he expressed it. Born in a town, Taggart had not much country lore—at sparrows, blackbirds, thrushes, his knowledge stopped; but he enjoyed the bobbery the little beggars were kicking up, and, though a trifle stiff perhaps, he felt 'fine.'

He lit his pipe, and almost at once his brain

began to revolve the daily problem of how to get a job, and of why he had lost the one he had.

Walking, three months ago, burly, upright, secure and jolly, into the room of his chief at the offices of 'Conglomerated Journals, Ltd.,' he had been greeted with:

"Morning, Taggart. Georgie Grebe is to give us an article for the *Lighthouse*. He won't be able to write it, of course. Just do me a column he could sign—something Grebeish. I want a feature of that sort every week now in the *Lighthouse;* got half a dozen really good names. We simply must get it on its legs with the big Public."

Taggart smiled. Georgie Grebe! The name was a household word—tophole idea to get him!

"Did he ever write a line in his life, sir?"

"Don't suppose so—but you know the sort of thing he *would* write; he gets nothing for it but the Ad. The week after I've got Sir Cutman Kane—you'll want to be a bit careful there; but you can get his manner from that book of his on murder trials. He hasn't got a minute—must have it devilled; but he'll sign anything decently done. I'm going to *make* 'em buy the *Lighthouse,* Taggart. Get on to the Grebe article at once, will you."

Taggart nodded, and, drawing from his pocket

some typewritten sheets of paper, laid them on the bureau.

"Here's your signed leader, sir; I've gingered it a bit too much, perhaps."

"Haven't time to look at it; got to catch a train."

"Shall I tone it down a little?"

"Better perhaps; use your judgment. Sit here, and do it now. Good-bye; back on Friday."

Reaching for his soft hat, assisted into his coat by Taggart, the chief was gone.

Taggart sat down to pencil the signed leader.

'Good leader,' he thought; 'pity nobody knows I write 'em!'

This devilling was quite an art, and, not unlike art, poorly enough paid. Still, not bad fun feeling you were the pea and the chief only the shell—the chief, with his great name and controlling influence. He finished pencilling, O.K.'d the sheets, thought, 'Georgie Grebe! what the deuce shall I write about?' and went back to his room.

It was not much of a room, and there was not much in it except Jimmy Counter, smoking a pipe and writing furiously.

Taggart sat down too, lit his own pipe, took a sheet of paper and scrawled the words 'Georgie Grebe Article' across the top.

Georgie Grebe! It *was* a scoop! The chief had a wonderful flair for just the names that got the Public. There was something rather beautifully simple about writing an article for a man who had never written a line—something virginal in the conception. And when you came to think of it, something virginal in the Public's buying of the article to read the thoughts of their idol, Georgie Grebe. Yes, and what were their idol's thoughts? If he, Taggart, didn't know, nobody would, not even the idol! Taggart smiled, then felt a little nervous. Georgie Grebe—celebrated clown—probably he hadn't any thoughts! Really, there was something very trustful about the Public! He dipped his pen in ink and sat staring at the nib. Trustful! The word had disturbed the transparency of his mental process, as a crystal of peroxide will disturb and colour a basinful of water. Trustful! The Public would pay their pennies to read what they thought were the thoughts of Georgie Grebe. But——! Taggart bit into the pipe stem. Steady! He was getting on too fast. Of course Georgie Grebe had thoughts if he signed them—hadn't he? His name would be reproduced in autograph, with the indispensable portrait. People would see by his features that he must have had them. Was the Public so very

trustful then? The evidence was there all right. Fraudulent? This was just devilling, there was nothing fraudulent about 'devilling'—everybody did it. You might as well say those signed leaders written for the chief were fraudulent. Of course they weren't—only devilled! The Public paid for the thoughts of the chief, and there they were since he signed them. Devilled thoughts! And yet! Would the public pay if those leaders were signed A. P. Taggart? The thoughts would be the same—and very good. They ought to pay—but—would they? He struck another match, and wrote:

"I am no writer, ladies and gentlemen. I am—believe me—a simple clown. In balancing this new pole upon my nose I am conscious of a certain sense of fraud——"

He crossed out the paragraph. That word again—must keep it from buzzing senselessly round his brain like this! He was only devilling; hold on to 'devilling'; it was his living to devil—more or less—just earning his living—getting nothing out of it! Neither was Georgie Grebe—only the Ad.! Then who was getting something out of it? 'Conglomerated Journals'! Out of Georgie Grebe's name; out of the chief's name below the devilled leaders—a pretty penny! Well, what harm in making the most of a big name? Taggart frowned.

Suppose a man went into a shop and bought a box of pills, marked 'Holloway,' made up from a recipe of 'Tompkins'—did it matter that the man thought they were Holloway's, if they were just as good pills, perhaps better? Taggart laid down his pen and took his pipe out of his mouth. 'Gosh!' he thought, 'never looked at it this way before! I believe it does matter. A man ought to get the exact article he pays for. If not, any fraud is possible. New Zealand mutton can be sold as English. Jaeger stuffs can have cotton in them. This Grebe article's a fraud.' He relit his pipe. With the first puff his English hatred of a moral attitude or 'swank' of any sort beset him. Who was he to take stand against a custom? Didn't secretaries write the speeches of Parliamentary 'big-bugs'? Weren't the opinions of eminent lawyers often written by their juniors, read over and signed? Weren't briefs and pleadings devilled? Yes; but all that was different. In such cases the Public weren't paying for expression, they were paying for knowledge; the big lawyer put his imprimatur on the knowledge, not on the expression of it; the Cabinet Minister endorsed his views, whether he had written them out or not, and it was his views the Public paid for, not the expression of them. But in this Grebe article the Public

would not be paying for any knowledge it contained, nor for any serious views; it would pay for a peep into the mind of their idol. 'And his mind will be mine!' thought Taggart; 'but who'd pay a penny to peep into that?' He got up, and sat down again.

With a Public so gullible—what did it matter? They lapped up anything and asked for more. Yes! But weren't the gullible the very people who oughtn't to be gulled? He rose again, and toured the dishevelled room. The man at the other table raised his head.

"You seem a bit on your toes."

Taggart stared down at him.

"I've got to write some drivel in the *Lighthouse* for Georgie Grebe to sign. It's just struck me that it's a fraud on the Public. What do you say, Jimmy?"

"In a way. What about it?"

"If it is, I don't want to do it—that's all."

His colleague whistled.

"My dear chap, here am I writing a racing article 'From the Man in the Paddock'—I haven't been on a racecourse for years."

"Oh! well—that's venial."

"All's venial in our game. Shut your eyes, and swallow. You're only devilling."

"Ga!" said Taggart. "Give a thing a decent label, and it is decent."

"I say, old man, what did you have for breakfast?"

"Look here, Jimmy, I'm inclined to think I've struck a snag. It never occurred to me before."

"Well, don't let it occur to you again. Think of old Dumas; I've heard he put his name to sixty volumes in one year. Has that done him any harm?"

Taggart rumpled his hair, reddish and rather stiff.

"Damn!" he said.

Counter laughed.

"You get a fixed screw for doing what you're told. Why worry? Papers must be sold. Georgie Grebe—that's some stunt."

"Blast Georgie Grebe!"

He took his hat and went out; a prolonged whistle followed him. All next day he spent doing other jobs, trying to persuade himself that he was a crank, and gingerly feeling the mouths of journalists. All he got was: Fuss about nothing! What was the matter with devilling? With life at such pressure, what else could you have? But with the best intentions he could not persuade himself to go on with the thoughts of Georgie Grebe.

And he remembered suddenly that his father had changed the dogmas of his religion at forty-five, and thereby lost a cure of souls. He was very unhappy; it was like discovering that he had inherited tuberculosis. On Friday he was sent for by the chief.

"Morning, Taggart; I'm just back. Look here, this leader for to-morrow—it's nothing but a string of statements. Where's my style?"

Taggart shifted his considerable weight from foot to foot.

"Well, sir," he said, "I thought perhaps you'd like to put that in yourself, for a change. The facts are all right."

The chief stared.

"My good fellow, do you suppose I've got time for that? Anybody could have written this; I can't sign it as it stands. Tone it up."

Taggart took the article from the chief's hand.

"I don't know that I can," he said; "I'm——" and stopped.

The chief said kindly:

"Ill?"

Taggart disclaimed.

"Private trouble?"

"No."

"Well, get on with it, then. How's the Grebe article turned out?"

"It hasn't."

"How do you mean?"

Taggart felt his body stiffening.

"Fact is, I can't write it."

"Good gracious, man, any drivel will do, so long as it's got a flavour of some sort to carry the name."

Taggart swallowed.

"That's it. Is it quite playing the game with the Public, sir?"

The chief seemed to loom larger suddenly.

"I don't follow you, Taggart."

Taggart blurted out: "I don't want to write anyone else's stuff in future, unless it's just news or facts."

The chief's face grew very red.

"I pay you to do certain work. If you don't care to carry out instructions, we can dispense with your services. What's the matter with you, Taggart?"

Taggart replied with a wry smile:

"Suffering from a fit of conscience, sir. Isn't it a matter of commercial honesty?"

The chief sat back in his swivel chair and gazed at him for quite twenty seconds.

"Well," he said at last in an icy voice, "I have never been so insulted. Good-morning! You are at liberty."

Taggart laid down the sheets of paper, walked stiffly to the door, and turned.

"Awfully sorry, sir, can't help it."

The chief bowed distantly, and Taggart went out.

For three months he had enjoyed liberty. Journalism was overstocked; his name not well known. Too shy and proud to ask for recommendation from 'Conglomerated Journals,' he could never bring himself to explain why he had 'got the hoof.' Claim a higher standard of morality than his fellows—not he! For two months he had carried on pretty well, but the last few weeks had brought him low indeed. Yet the more he brooded, the more he felt that he had been right, and the less inclined he was to speak of it. Loyalty to the chief he had insulted by taking such an attitude, dislike of being thought a fool, beyond all, dread of 'swanking' kept him silent. When asked why he had left 'Conglomerated Journals' he returned the answer always: "Disagreement on a point of principle," and refused to enter into details. But a feeling had got about that he was a bit of a crank; for, though no one at 'Conglomerated Journals' knew exactly why he had vanished, Counter had spread the news that he had blasted Georgie Grebe, and refused to write his article. Someone else had done it. Taggart read the production with irritation. It

was jolly bad. Inefficient devilling still hurt one who had devilled long and efficiently without a qualm. When the article which had not been written by Sir Cutman Kane appeared—he swore aloud. It was no more like the one Sir Cutman would have signed if Taggart had written it than the boots of Taggart were like the boots of the chief, who seemed to wear a fresh pair every day, with cloth tops. He read the chief's new leaders with melancholy, spotting the many deficiencies of style supplied to the chief by the poor devil who now wrote them. His square, red, cheerful face had a bitter look while he was reading; and when he had finished, he would rumple his stiff hair. He was sturdy, and never got so far as calling himself a fool for his pains; but, week by week, he felt more certain that his protest had been in vain.

Sitting against the ranger's palings, listening to the birds, he had a dreamy feeling about it all. Queer creatures, human beings! So damned uncritical! Had he not been like that himself for years and years? The power of a label—that was what struck him, sitting there. Label a thing decently, and it *was* decent! Ah! but, 'Rue by any other name would smell as sour!' Conscience!—it was the deuce!

1922.

SALTA PRO NOBIS

(A Variation)

"The dancer, my Mother, is very sad. She sits with her head on her hands. She looks into the emptiness. It is frightful to watch. I have tried to make her pray, my Mother, but the poor girl does not know how; she has no belief. She refuses even to confess herself. She is pagan—but quite pagan. What could one do for her, my Mother—to cheer her a little during these hours? I have tried to make her tell me of her life. She does not answer. She sits and looks always into the emptiness. It does me harm in the heart to see her. Is there nothing one can do to comfort her a little before she dies? To die so young—so full of life; for her who has no faith! To be shot—so young, so beautiful; but it is frightful, my Mother!"

The little elderly Sister raised her hands and crossed them on her grey-clothed breast. Her eyes, brown and mild, looked up, questioning the face before her, wax-pale under its coif and smooth grey hair. Straight, thin, as it were bodiless, beneath her grey and white garb, the Mother Superior stood

pondering. The spy-woman in her charge, a dancer with gipsy blood they said—or was it Moorish?—who had wormed secrets from her French naval lover and sold them to the Germans in Spain. At the trial they said there was no doubt. And they had brought her to the convent saying: "Keep her for us till the fifteenth. She will be better with you than in prison." To be shot—a woman! It made one shiver! And yet—it was war! It was for France!

And, looking down at the little elderly Sister, the Mother Superior answered:

"One must see, my daughter. Take me to her cell."

They went in gently. The dancer was sitting on her bed. There was no colour in her skin save the saffron sprinkled into it by eastern blood. The face was oval, the eyebrows slanted a little up; black hair formed on her forehead a V reversed; her lips, sensuous but fine, showed a gleam of teeth. Her arms were crossed as though compressing the fire within her supple body. Her eyes, colour of Malaga wine, looked through and beyond the whitened walls, through and beyond her visitors, like the eyes of a caged leopard.

The Mother Superior spoke:

"What can we do for you, my daughter?"

The dancer shrugged.

"You suffer, my daughter. They tell me you do not pray. It is a pity."

The dancer's passing smile had the sweetness of something tasted, of a rich tune, a long kiss; she shook her head.

"One would not say anything to trouble you, my daughter; one feels pity for your suffering. One comprehends. Is there a book you would read; some wine you would like; in a word, anything which could distract you a little?"

The dancer clasped her hands behind her neck. The movement was beautiful, sinuous—all her body beautiful. A faint colour came into the Mother Superior's waxen cheeks.

"Would you wish to dance for us, my daughter?"

On the dancer's face the smile came again and did not pass.

"Willingly. It will give me pleasure, madame!"

"That is well! Your dresses shall be brought. This evening in the refectory after the meal. If you wish music—one can place a piano. Sister Mathilde is a good musician."

"Music—some simple dances. Madame, could I smoke?"

"Certainly, my daughter. I will have cigarettes brought to you."

The dancer stretched out her hand. Between her own thin hands the Mother Superior felt its supple warmth. To-morrow it would be cold and stiff!

"*Au revoir!* then, my daughter . . ."

"The dancer will dance for us!" This was the word. One waited, expectant, as for a miracle. One placed the piano; procured music; sat eating the evening meal—whispering. The strangeness of it! The intrusion! The little gay ghosts of memories! Ah! the dramatic, the marvellous event! Soon the meal was finished; the tables cleared, removed; against the wall on the long benches sixty grey white-coifed figures waited—in the centre the Mother Superior, at the piano Sister Mathilde.

The little elderly Sister came first; then, down the long whitened refectory, the dancer swaying slowly over the dark-oak floor. Every head was turned—alone the Mother Superior sat motionless. If only it did not put notions into some light heads!

The dancer wore a full skirt of black silk, she had silvery shoes and stockings, round her waist was a broad tight network of gold, over her bust tight silvery tissue, with black lace draped; her arms

were bare; a red flower was set to one side of her black hair; she held a black and ivory fan. Her lips were just touched with red, her eyes just touched with black; her powdered face was like a mask. She stood in the very centre, with eyes cast down. Sister Mathilde began to play. The dancer lifted her fan. In that dance of Spain she hardly moved from where she stood, swaying, shivering, spinning, poised; but her eyes darted from this face to that of the long row of faces, where so many feelings were expressed—curiosity and doubt, pleasure, timidity, horror, sympathy. Sister Mathilde ceased playing. A little murmur broke along the line of nuns, and the dancer smiled. Sister Mathilde began again to play. For a moment the dancer listened as if to catch the rhythm of music strange to her; then her feet moved, her lips parted, sweet and gay she was, like a butterfly, without a care; and on the lips of the watching faces smiles came, and little murmurs of pleasure escaped.

The Mother Superior sat without moving, her lips pressed together, her fingers interlaced. Images from the past kept starting out, and falling back, like figures from some curious old musical box. She was remembering her lover killed in the Franco-Prussian war, her entrance into religion all that time ago. This figure from

the heathen world, with the red flower in her black hair, the whitened face, the sweetened eyes, stirred a yearning for her own gay pulses, before they had seemed to die, and she brought them to the church to bury them.

The music ceased; began again. Now it was a Habañera, awakening remembrance of those pulses after they were buried—secret, throbbing, dark. The Mother Superior turned her face to left and right. Had she been wise? So many light heads, so many young hearts! And yet how not soothe the last dark hours of this poor heathen girl—the hours so few! She was happy dancing. Yes, she was happy! What power! And what abandonment! It was frightening. She was holding every eye—the eyes even of Sister Louise—holding them as a snake holds a rabbit's eyes. The Mother Superior nearly smiled. That poor Sister Louise! And then, just beyond that face of fascinated horror, she saw young Sister Marie. How the child stared—what eyes, what lips! Sister Marie—so young—just twenty—her lover killed in the war—but one year dead! Sister Marie—prettiest in all the convent! Her hands—how tightly they seemed pressed together on her lap! And—but, yes—it was at Sister Marie that the dancer looked; at Sister Marie she was twirling and writhing those

supple limbs! For Sister Marie the strange sweet smile came and went on those enticing lips. In dance after dance—like a bee on a favourite flower—to Sister Marie the dancer seemed to cling. And the Mother Superior thought: 'Have I done a work of mercy, or—the Devil's?'

Close along the line of nuns the dancer swept; her eyes were glowing, her face proud. On Sister Marie a look alighted, a touch with the fan, a blown kiss, "*Gracias, Señoras! Adios!*"

And swaying, as she had come, she glided away over the dark floor; and the little old Sister followed.

A sighing sound rose from the long row of nuns; and—yes—one sob!

"Go to your rooms, my daughters! Sister Marie!"

The young nun came forward; tears were in her eyes.

"Sister Marie, pray that the sins of that poor soul be forgiven. But, yes, my child, it is sad. Go to your room, and pray!"

With what grace the child walked! She, too, had the limbs of beauty, and the Mother Superior sighed . . .

Morning, cold and grey, a sprinkle of snow on the ground. They came for the dancer during

Mass. Later a sound of firing! With trembling lips the Mother Superior prayed for the soul dancing before her God . . .

That evening they searched for Sister Marie, and could not find her. After two days a letter came.

"Forgive me, my Mother. I have gone back to life.

"MARIE."

Life out of death! The Mother Superior sat quite still. Figures from the past were stealing out again; and the dancer's face with the red flower in her hair, the dark sweetened eyes, the lips, touched with a flying finger, parted in a kiss!

1922.

PHILANTHROPY

MIST enwrapped Restington-on-Sea; not very thick, but exceedingly clammy. It decked the autumn trees in weirdness, cobwebbed the tamarisks, and compelled Henry Ivor to shut his window, excluding the faint hiss and rustle from the beach. He seldom wrote after tea without the accompaniment of fresh air, and was drowsing over his pen when his housekeeper entered.

"A couple to see you, sir; they came once before, when you was away."

Ivor blinked. "Well, show them in."

When the door was again opened a scent of whisky came in first, then a man, a woman, and a dog.

Ivor laid down his pen, and rose; he had never seen any of them before, and immediately doubted whether he wanted to see any of them again. Never able, however, to be disagreeable at a moment's notice, he waited defensively. The man, who might have been thirty-five, pale, warped, and thin, seemed to extract his face from the grip of nerves.

"Hearing you were down here, sir, and being in the printing trade, if you understand my meaning——"

Ivor nodded; he did not want to nod, but it seemed unavoidable; and he looked at the woman. Her face was buttoned, the most expressionless he had ever seen.

"Well?" he said.

The man's lips, thin and down at one corner, writhed again.

"You being a well-known writer," he said, and the scent of whisky deepened.

Ivor thought: 'It wants courage to beg; it's damp too. Perhaps he's only primed himself.'

"Well?" he said again.

"If you understand me," said the man, "I'm in a very delicate position. I expect you know Mr. Gloy—Charles Gloy—editor of *Cribbage*——"

"No," said Ivor. "But will you sit down?" And he placed two chairs.

The man and the woman sat down on their edges, the dog, too, sat on its edge! Ivor regarded it—a Schipperke—thinking:

'Did they bring their dog to undermine me?' As to that, it was the only kind of dog he did not like, but it looked damp and woeful.

"My brother works for Mr. Gloy," said the

man; "so, being at Beachhampton—out of a job, if you understand my meaning—I brought my wife—you being a well-known philanthropist——"

Ivor nervously took out a cigarette, and nervously put it back.

"I don't know what I can do for you," he murmured.

"I'm one to speak the truth," resumed the man, "if you follow me——" And Ivor did—he followed on and on behind a wandering tale of printing, the war, ill-health. At last he said in despair:

"I really can't recommend people I know nothing about. What exactly do you want me to do?"

The woman's face seemed suddenly to lose a button, as if she were going to cry, but just then the dog whimpered; she took it up on her lap. Ivor thought:

'How much have I got on me?'

"The fact is, Mr. Ivor," said the man, "I'm broke to the world, if you understand my meaning. If once I could get back to London——"

"What do you say, madam?"

The woman's mouth quivered and mumbled; Ivor stopped her with his hand.

"Well," he said, "I can give you enough to get up to London with, and a little over. But

that's all, I'm afraid. And, forgive me, I'm very busy." He stood up. The man rose also.

"I don't want to say anything about my wife; you'll forgive my mentioning it, but there's not a lady in England that's her equal at makin' babies' slippers."

"Indeed!" said Ivor. "Well, here you are!" And he held out some pound notes. The man took the notes; one of his trouser-legs was pitiably patched.

"I'm sure I'm more than grateful——" he said; and looking at Ivor as if he expected to be contradicted, added: "I can't say better than that, can I?"

"No," said Ivor, and opened the door.

"I'll be ready to repay you as soon as ever I can—if you understand my meaning."

"Yes," said Ivor. "Good-day! Good-day, Mrs. ——! Good-bye, little dog!"

One by one the three passed him and went out into the mist. Ivor saw them trailing down the road, shut the outer door, returned to his chair, sighed profoundly, and took up his pen.

When he had written three pages, and it was getting too dusk to see, his housekeeper came in.

"There's a boy from the Black Cow, sir, come to say they want you down there."

"Want *me?*"

"Yes, sir. That couple—the boy says they don't know what to do with them. They gave your name as being a friend."

"Good Lord!"

"Yes, sir; and the landlord says they don't seem to know where they come from like."

"Heavens!" said Ivor. He got up, however, put on his overcoat, and went out.

In the lighted doorway of the Black Cow stood the landlord.

"Sorry to have troubled you, sir, but really I can't tell how to deal with these friends of yours."

Ivor frowned. "I only saw them for the first time this afternoon. I just gave them money to go up to London with. Are they drunk?"

"Drunk!" said the landlord. "Well, if I'd known the man was half gone when he came in—of course I'd never—— As to the woman, she sits and smiles. I can't get them to budge, and it's early closin'——"

"Well," muttered Ivor, "let's look at them!" And he followed the landlord in.

On the window-seat in the bar parlour those two were sitting, with mugs beside them, and the dog asleep on the feet of the woman, whose lips were unbuttoned in a foolish smile. Ivor looked at the man; his face was blank and beatific. Specimens

of a damp and doleful world, they now seemed almost blissful.

"Mist' Ivor?" said the man suddenly.

"Yes," said Ivor, "but I thought you wanted to go up to London. The station's not half a mile."

"Cert'nly—go up to London."

"Come along, then; I'll show you the way."

"Ve'y good, we can walk, if you understand my meaning." And the man stood up, the dog and the woman also. All three passed unsteadily out.

The man walked first, then the woman, then the dog, wavering into the dusky mist. Ivor followed, praying that they might meet no traffic. The man's voice broke the silence in front.

"Hen'y Ivor!" Ivor closed up nervously.

"Hen'y Ivor! I see 'm sayin' to 'mself: 'What'll they move on for!' I see him, if y' understand my meaning. Wha'sh he good for—Hen'y Ivor—only writer o' books. Is he any better than me—no! Not 's good, if you f-follow me. I see 'm thinkin': 'How can I get rid of 'm?'" He stood still suddenly, almost on Ivor's toes. "Where's dog—carry th' dog—get 'is feet wet."

The woman stooped unsteadily, picked up the dog, and they both wavered on again. Ivor walked

alongside now, grim and apprehensive. The man seemed to have become aware of him.

"Mist' Ivor," he said. "Thought so—I'm not tight—can't say better than that, can I?—I'm not writer of books like you—not plutocrat, if you understand my meaning. Want to ask you question: What would you do if you was me?"

There was silence, but for the slip-slippering of the woman's feet behind.

"I don' blame you," said the man, whose speech was getting thicker; "you can't help being a plutothrist. But whash the good of anything for me, except ob-oblivion, if you follow me?"

A faint radiance shone through the mist. The station building loomed suddenly quite close. Ivor steered towards it.

"Goin' up t' London," said the man. "Qui' right!"

He lurched past into the lighted entry, and the woman followed with the dog. Ivor saw them waver through the doorway. And, spinning round, he ran into the mist. 'Perfectly true!' he thought while he was running. Perfectly true! Why had he helped them? What did he care so long as he got rid of man, woman, and dog?

1922.

A LONG-AGO AFFAIR

HUBERT MARSLAND, the landscape painter, returning from a day's sketching on the river in the summer of 1921, had occasion to stay the progress of his two-seater about ten miles from London for a minor repair, and while his car was being seen to, strolled away from the garage to have a look at a house where he had often spent his holidays as a boy. Walking through a gateway and passing a large gravel-pit on his left, he was soon opposite the house, which stood back a little in its grounds. Very much changed! More pretentious, not so homely as when his uncle and aunt lived there, and he used to play cricket on this warren opposite, where the cricket ground, it seemed, had been turned into a golf course. It was late—the dinner hour, nobody playing, and passing on to the links he stood digesting the geography. Here must have been where the old pavilion was. And there—still turfed—where he had made that particularly nice stroke to leg, when he went in last and carried his bat for thirteen. Thirty-nine years ago—his sixteenth birthday. How vividly he remembered his

new pads! A. P. Lucas had played against them and only made thirty-two. One founded one's style on A. P. Lucas in those days—feet in front of the bat, and pointed a little forward, elegant; you never saw it now, and a good thing too—one could sacrifice too much to style! Still, the tendency was all the other way; style was too much 'off,' perhaps!

He stepped back into the sun and sat down on the grass. Peaceful—very still! The haze of the distant downs was visible between his uncle's old house and the next; and there was the clump of elms on the far side behind which the sun would be going down just as it used to then. He pressed the palms of his hands to the turf. A glorious summer—something like that summer of long ago. And warmth from the turf, or perhaps from the past, crept into his heart, and made it ache a little. Just here he must have sat, after his innings, at Mrs. Monteith's feet peeping out of a flounced dress. Lord! The fools boys were! How headlong and uncalculating their devotions! A softness in voice and eyes, a smile, a touch or two—and they were slaves! Young fools, but good young fools. And, standing behind her chair—he could see him now—that other idol, Captain MacKay, with his face of browned ivory—just the

colour of that elephant's tusk his uncle had, which had gone so yellow—and his perfect black moustache, his white tie, check suit, carnation, spats, Malacca cane—all so fascinating! Mrs. Monteith, 'the grass widow' they had called her! He remembered the look in people's eyes, the tone in their voices. Such a pretty woman! He had 'fallen for her' at first sight, as the Yanks put it—her special scent, her daintiness, her voice! And that day on the river, when she made much of him, and Captain MacKay attended Evelyn Curtiss so assiduously that he was expected to propose. Quaint period! They used the word courting then, wore full skirts, high stays; and himself a blue elastic belt round his white-flannelled waist. And in the evening afterwards, his aunt had said with an arch smile: "Good-night, *silly* boy!" Silly boy, indeed, with a flower the grass widow had dropped pressed by his cheek into his pillow! What folly! And that next Sunday—looking forward to church—passionately brushing his top hat; all through the service spying at her creamy profile, two pews in front on the left, between goat-bearded old Hallgrave, her uncle, and her pink, broad, white-haired aunt; scheming to get near her when she came out, lingering, lurking, getting just a smile and the rustle of her

flounces. Ah, ha! A little went a long way then! And the last day of his holidays and its night with the first introduction to reality. Who said the Victorian Age was innocent?

Marsland put his palm up to his cheek. No! the dew was not yet falling! And his mind lightly turned and tossed his memories of women, as a man turns and tosses hay to air it; but nothing remembered gave him quite the feeling of that first experience.

His aunt's dance! His first white waistcoat, bought *ad hoc*, from the local tailor, his tie laboriously imitating the hero—Captain MacKay's. All came back with such freshness in the quiet of the warren—the expectancy, the humble shy excitement, the breathless asking for a dance, the writing 'Mrs. Monteith' twice on his little gilt-edged programme with its tiny tasselled white pencil; her slow-moving fan, her smile. And the first dance when it came; what infinite care not to tread on her white satin toes; what a thrill when her arm pressed his in the crush—such holy rapture, about all the first part of that evening, with yet another dance to come! If only he could have twirled her and 'reversed' like his pattern, Captain MacKay! Then delirium growing as the second dance came near, making him cut his

partner—the cool grass-scented air out on the dark terrace, with the chafers booming by, and in the starshine the poplars wondrously tall, the careful adjustment of his tie and waistcoat, the careful polishing of his hot face! A long breath then, and into the house to find her! Ballroom, supper-room, stairs, library, billiard-room, all drawn blank—'Estudiantina' going on and on, and he a wandering, white-waistcoated young ghost. Ah! The conservatory—and the hurrying there! And then the moment which had always been, was even now, such a blurred, confused impression. Smothered voices from between a clump of flowers: "I saw her." "Who was the man?" A glimpse, gone past in a flash, of an ivory face, a black moustache! And then her voice: "Hubert;" and her hot hand clasping his, drawing him to her; her scent, her face smiling, very set! A rustling behind the flowers, those people spying; and suddenly her lips on his cheek, the kiss sounding in his ears, her voice saying, very softly: "Hubert, dear boy!" The rustle receded, ceased. What a long, silent minute, then, among the ferns and blossoms in the dusk with her face close to his, pale, perturbed, before she led him out into the light, while he was slowly realising that she had made use of him to shelter her. A boy—not old

enough to be her lover, but old enough to save her name and that of Captain Mackay! Her kiss—the last of many. Oh, no! not upon *his* lips, *his* cheeks! Hard work realising that! A boy—of no account—a boy, who in a day would be at school again, kissed that *he* and *she* might renew their intrigue unsuspected!

How had he behaved the rest of that evening of romance bedrabbled? He hardly knew. Betrayed with a kiss! Two idols in the dust! And did they care what he was feeling? Not they! All they cared for was to cover up their tracks with him! But somehow—somehow—he had never shown her that he knew. Only, when their dance was over, and someone came and took her for the next, he escaped up to his little room, tore off his gloves, his waistcoat; lay on his bed, thought bitter thoughts. A boy! There he had stayed, with the thrum of the music in his ears, till at last it died away for good and the carriages were gone, and the night was quiet.

Squatting on the warren grass, still warm and dewless, Marsland rubbed his knees. Nothing like boys for generosity! And, with a little smile, he thought of his aunt next morning, half-arch and half-concerned: "It isn't nice, dear, to sit out in dark corners, and—well, perhaps, it wasn't your

fault, but still, it isn't nice—not—quite——" and of how suddenly she had stopped, looking in his face, where his lips were curling in his first ironic laugh. She had never forgiven him that laugh—thinking him a cynical young Lothario? And Marsland thought: 'Live and learn! Wonder what became of those two? Victorian Age! Hatches were battened down in those days! But, innocent—my hat!'

Ah! The sun was off, dew falling! He got up, rubbing his knees to take the stiffness out of them. Pigeons in the wood beyond were calling. A window in his uncle's old home blazed like a jewel in the sun's last rays between the poplar trees. Heh! dear—a little long-ago affair!

1922.

ACME

In these days no man of genius need starve. The following story of my friend Bruce may be taken as proof of this assertion. Nearly sixty when I first knew him, he must have written already some fifteen books, which had earned him the reputation of 'a genius' with the few who know. He used to live in York Street, Adelphi, where he had two rooms up the very shaky staircase of a house chiefly remarkable for the fact that its front door seemed always open. I suppose there never was a writer more indifferent to what people thought of him. He profoundly neglected the Press—not with one of those neglects which grow on writers from reading reviews of their own works—he seemed never to read criticism, but with the basic neglect of 'an original,' a nomadic spirit, a stranger in modern civilisation, who would leave his attics for long months of wandering and come back there to hibernate and write a book. He was a tall, thin man, with a face rather like Mark Twain's, black eyebrows which bristled and shot up, a bitten, drooping grey moustache, and fuzzy grey hair; but

his eyes were like owl's eyes, piercing, melancholy, dark brown, and gave to his rugged face the extraordinary expression of a spirit remote from the flesh which had captured it. He was a bachelor, who seemed to avoid women; perhaps they had 'learned' him that; for he must have been very attractive to them.

The year of which I write had been to my friend Bruce the devil, monetarily speaking. With his passion for writing that for which his age had no taste—what could he expect? His last book had been a complete frost. He had undergone, too, an operation which had cost him much money and left him very weak. When I went to see him that October I found him stretched out on two chairs, smoking the Brazilian cigarettes which he affected —and which always affected me, so black and strong they were, in their yellow maize-leaf coverings. He had a writing-pad on his knee, and sheets of paper scattered all around. The room had a very meagre look. I had not seen him for a year and more, but he looked up at me as if I'd been in yesterday.

"Hallo!" he said. "I went into a thing they call a cinema last night. Have you ever been?"

"Ever been? Do you know how long the cinema has been going? Since about 1900."

"Well! What a *thing!* I'm writing a skit on it!"

"How—a skit?"

"Parody—wildest yarn you ever read."

He took up a sheet of paper and began chuckling to himself.

"My heroine," he said, "is an Octoroon. Her eyes swim, and her lovely bosom heaves. Everybody wants her, and she's more virtuous than words can say. The situations she doesn't succumb to would freeze your blood; they'd roast your marrow. She has a perfect devil of a brother, with whom she was brought up, and who knows her deep dark secret and wants to trade her off to a millionaire who also has a deep dark secret. Altogether there are four deep dark secrets in my yarn. It's a corker."

"What a waste of your time!" I said.

"My time!" he answered fiercely. "What's the use of my time? Nobody buys my books."

"Who's attending you?"

"Doctors! They take your money, that's all. I've got no money. Don't talk about me!" Again he took up a sheet of manuscript; and chuckled.

"Last night—at that place—they had—good God!—a race between a train and a motor-car. Well, I've got one between a train, a motor-car, a flying machine, and a horse."

I sat up.

"May I have a look at your skit," I said, "when you've finished it?"

"It *is* finished. Wrote it straight off. D'you think I could stop and then go on again with a thing like that?" He gathered the sheets and held them out to me. "Take the thing—it's amused me to do it. The heroine's secret is that she isn't an Octoroon at all; she's a De La Casse —purest Creole blood of the South; and her villainous brother isn't her brother; and the bad millionaire isn't a millionaire; and her penniless lover is. It's rich, I tell you!"

"Thanks," I said dryly, and took the sheets.

I went away concerned about my friend, his illness and his poverty, especially his poverty, for I saw no end to it.

After dinner that evening I began languidly to read his skit. I had not read two pages of the thirty-five before I started up, sat down again, and feverishly read on. Skit! By George! He had written a perfect scenario—or, rather, that which wanted the merest professional touching-up to be perfect. I was excited. It was a little gold-mine if properly handled. Any good film company, I felt convinced, would catch at it. Yes! But how to handle it? Bruce was such an unaccountable creature, such a wild old bird! Imagine his having

only just realised the cinema! If I told him his skit was a serious film, he would say: "Good God!" and put it in the fire, priceless though it was. And yet, how could I market it without *carte blanche*, and how get *carte blanche* without giving my discovery away? I was deathly keen on getting some money for him; and this thing, properly worked, might almost make him independent. I felt as if I had a priceless museum piece which a single stumble might shatter to fragments. The tone of his voice when he spoke of the cinema—"What a *thing!*"—kept coming back to me. He was prickly proud, too—very difficult about money. Could I work it without telling him anything? I knew he never looked at a newspaper. But should I be justified in taking advantage of that—in getting the thing accepted and produced without his knowing? I revolved the question for hours, and went to see him again next day.

He was reading.

"Hallo! You again? What do you think of this theory—that the Egyptians derive from a Saharan civilisation?"

"I don't think," I said.

"It's nonsense. This fellow——"

I interrupted him.

"Do you want that skit back, or can I keep it?"

"Skit? What skit?"

"The thing you gave me yesterday."

"That! Light your fire with it. This fellow——"

"Yes," I said; "I'll light a fire with it. I see you're busy."

"Oh, no! I'm not," he said. "I've nothing to do. What's the good of my writing? I earn less and less with every book that comes out. I'm dying of poverty."

"That's because you won't consider the Public."

"How can I consider the Public when I don't know what they want?"

"Because you won't take the trouble to find out. If I suggested a way to you of pleasing the Public and making money you'd kick me out of the room."

And the words, "For instance, I've got a little gold-mine of yours in my pocket," were on the tip of my tongue, but I choked them back. 'Daren't risk it!' I thought. 'He's given you the thing. *Carte blanche—cartes serrés!*'

I took the gold-mine away and promptly rough-shaped it for the film. It was perfectly easy, without any alteration of the story. Then I was faced with the temptation to put his name to it. The point was this: If I took it to a film company as an authorless scenario I should only get authorless terms; whereas, if I put his name to it, with a little

talking I could double the terms at least. The film public didn't know his name, of course, but the inner literary public did, and it's wonderful how you can impress the market with the word 'genius' judiciously used. It was too dangerous, however; and at last I hit on a middle course. I would take it to them with no name attached, but tell them it was by 'a genius,' and suggest that they could make capital out of the incognito. I knew they would feel it *was* by a genius.

I took it to an excellent company next day with a covering note saying: "The author, a man of recognised literary genius, for certain reasons prefers to remain unknown." They took a fortnight in which to rise, but they rose. They had to. The thing was too good in itself. For a week I played them over terms. Twice I delivered an ultimatum—twice they surrendered: they knew too well what they had got. I could have made a contract with two thousand pounds down which would have brought at least another two thousand pounds before the contract term closed; but I compounded for one that gave me three thousand pounds down as likely to lead to less difficulty with Bruce. The terms were not a whit too good for what was really the 'acme' of scenarios. If I could have been quite open I could certainly have done better. Finally, however, I signed the contract, delivered the

manuscript, and received a cheque for the price. I was elated, and at the same time knew that my troubles were just beginning. With Bruce's feeling about the film how the deuce should I get him to take the money? Could I go to his publishers and conspire with them to trickle it out to him gradually as if it came from his books? That meant letting them into the secret; besides, he was too used to receiving practically nothing from his books; it would lead him to make enquiry, and the secret was bound to come out. Could I get a lawyer to spring an inheritance on him? That would mean no end of lying and elaboration, even if a lawyer would consent. Should I send him the money in Bank of England notes with the words: 'From a lifelong admirer of your genius?' I was afraid he would suspect a trick, or stolen notes, and go to the police to trace them. Or should I just go, put the cheque on the table and tell him the truth?

The question worried me terribly, for I didn't feel entitled to consult others who knew him. It was the sort of thing that, if talked over, would certainly leak out. It was not desirable, however, to delay cashing a big cheque like that. Besides, they had started on the production. It happened to be a slack time, with a dearth of good films, so that they were rushing it on. And in the meantime there was Bruce—starved of everything he wanted,

unable to get away for want of money, depressed about his health and his future. And yet so completely had he always seemed to me different, strange, superior to this civilisation of ours, that the idea of going to him and saying simply : " This is yours, for the film you wrote," scared me. I could hear his : " I ? Write for the cinema ? What do you mean ?"

When I came to think of it, I had surely taken an extravagant liberty in marketing the thing without consulting him. I felt he would never forgive that, and my feeling towards him was so affectionate, even reverential, that I simply hated the idea of being wiped out of his good books. At last I hit on a way that by introducing my own interest might break my fall. I cashed the cheque, lodged the money at my bank, drew my own cheque on it for the full amount, and, armed with that and the contract, went to see him.

He was lying on two chairs smoking his Brazilians and playing with a stray cat which had attached itself to him. He seemed rather less prickly than usual, and, after beating about the bushes of his health and other matters, I began :

" I've got a confession to make, Bruce."

" Confession !" he said. " What confession ?"

" You remember that skit on the film you wrote and gave me about six weeks ago ?"

"No."

"Yes, you do—about an Octoroon."

He chuckled. "Oh! ah! That!"

I took a deep breath, and went on:

"Well, I sold it; and the price of course belongs to you."

"What? Who'd print a thing like that?"

"It isn't printed. It's been made into a film—super-film, they call it."

His hand came to a pause on the cat's back, and he glared at me. I hastened on:

"I ought to have told you what I was doing, but you're so prickly, and you've got such confounded superior notions. I thought if I did you'd be biting off your nose to spite your own face. The fact is it made a marvellous scenario. Here's the contract, and here's a cheque on my bank for the price—three thousand pounds. If you like to treat me as your agent, you owe me three hundred pounds. I don't expect it, but I'm not proud like you, and I shan't sneeze."

"Good God!" he said.

"Yes, I know. But it's all nonsense, Bruce. You can carry scruples to altogether too great length. Tainted source! Everything's tainted, if you come to that. The film's a quite justified expression of modern civilisation—a natural outcome of the age. It gives amusement; it affords

pleasure. It may be vulgar, it may be cheap, but we *are* vulgar, and we *are* cheap, and it's no use pretending we're not—not you, of course, Bruce, but people at large. A vulgar age wants vulgar amusement, and if we can give it that amusement we ought to; life's not too cheery, anyway."

The glare in his eyes was almost paralysing me, but I managed to stammer on:

"You live out of the world—you don't realise what humdrum people want; something to balance the greyness, the—the banality of their lives. They want blood, thrill, sensation of all sorts. You didn't mean to give it them, but you have, you've done them a benefit, whether you wish to or not, and the money's yours and you've got to take it."

The cat suddenly jumped down. I waited for the storm to burst.

"I know," I dashed on, "that you hate and despise the film——"

Suddenly his voice boomed out:

"Bosh! What are you talking about? Film! I go there every other night."

It was my turn to say "Good God!" And ramming contract and cheque into his empty hand, I bolted, closely followed by the cat.

1923.

LATE—299

I

1 §

It was disconcerting to the Governor. The man's smile was so peculiar. Of course, these educated prisoners—doctors, solicitors, parsons—one could never say good-bye to them quite without awkwardness; couldn't dismiss them with the usual "Shake hands! Hope you'll keep straight and have luck." No! With the finish of his sentence a gentleman resumed a kind of equality, ceased to be a number, ceased even being a name without a prefix, to which the law and the newspapers with their unfailing sense of what was proper at once reduced a prisoner on, or even before, his conviction. No. 299 was once more Dr. Philip Raider, in a suit of dark-grey tweeds, lean and limber, with grey hair grown again in readiness for the outer world, with deep-set, shining eyes, and that peculiar smile—a difficult subject. The Governor decided suddenly to say only: "Well, good-bye, Dr. Raider"; and, holding out his hand, he found it remain in contact with nothing.

So the fellow was going out in defiant mood—was he! The Governor felt it rather hard after more than two years; and his mind retraced his recollections of this prisoner. An illegal operation case! Not a good 'mixer'—not that his prisoners were allowed to mix; still, always reassuring to know that they would if not strenuously prevented! Record—Exemplary. Chaplain's report—Nothing doing (or words to that effect). Work—Bookbinding. Quite! But—chief memory—that of a long loose figure loping round at exercise, rather like a wolf. And there he stood! The tall Governor felt at the moment oddly short. He raised his hand from its posture of not too splendid isolation, and put the closure with a gesture. No. 299's lips moved:

"Is that all?"

Accustomed to being 'sirred' to the last, the Governor reddened. But the accent was so refined that he decided not to mention it.

"Yes, that's all."

"Thank you. Good-morning."

The eyes shone from under the brows, the smile curled the lips under the long, fine, slightly hooked nose; the man loped easily to the door. He carried his hands well. He made no noise going out. Damn! The fellow had looked so exactly as if

he had been thinking, 'You poor devil!' The Governor gazed round his office. Highly specialised life, no doubt! The windows had bars; it was here that he saw refractory prisoners in the morning, early. And, thrusting his hands into his pockets, he frowned. . . .

Outside, the head warder, straight, blue-clothed, grizzled, walked ahead, with a bunch of keys.

"All in order," he said to the blue-clothed janitor. "No. 299—going out. Anyone waiting for him?"

"No, sir."

"Right. Open!"

The door clanged under the key.

"Good-day to you," said the head warder.

The released prisoner turned his smiling face and nodded; turned it to the janitor, nodded again, and walked out between them, putting on a grey felt hat. The door clanged under the key.

"Smiling!" remarked the janitor.

"Ah! Cool customer," said the head warder. "Clever man, though, I'm told."

His voice sounded resentful, a little surprised, as if he had missed the last word by saying it. . . .

Hands in pockets, the released prisoner walked at leisure in the centre of the pavement. An

October day of misty sunshine, and the streets full of people seeking the midday meal. And if they chanced to glance at this passer-by their eyes would fly away at once, as a finger flies from a too hot iron. . . .

2 §

On the platform the prison chaplain, who had a day off and was going up to town, saw a face under a grey hat which seemed vaguely familiar.

"Yes," said a voice. "Late—299. Raider."

The chaplain felt surprise.

"Oh, ah!" he stammered. "You went out to-day, I think. I hope you——"

"Don't mention it!"

The train came clattering in. The chaplain entered a third-class compartment; Late—299 followed. The chaplain experienced something of a shock. Extremely unlike a prisoner! And this prisoner, out of whom he had, so to speak, had no change whatever these two years past, had always made him feel uncomfortable. There he sat opposite, turning his paper, smoking a cigarette, as if on terms of perfect equality. Lowering his own journal, the chaplain looked out of the window, trying to select a course of conduct; then, conscious that he was being stared

at, he took a flying look at his *vis-à-vis*. The man's face seemed saying: "Feel a bit awkward, don't you? But don't worry. I've no ill feeling. You have a devilish poor time."

Unable to find the proper reply to this look, the chaplain remarked:

"Nice day. Country's looking beautiful."

Late—299 turned those shining eyes of his towards the landscape. The man had a hungry face in spite of his smile; and the chaplain asked:

"Will you have a sandwich?"

"Thanks. . . ."

"Forgive my enquiring," said the chaplain presently, blowing crumbs off his knees, "but what will you do now? I hope you're going to——" How could he put it? 'Turn over a new leaf?' 'Make good?' 'Get going?' He could not put it; and instead took the cigarette which Late—299 was offering him. The man was speaking too; his words seemed to come slowly through the smoke, as if not yet used to a tongue.

"These last two years have been priceless."

"Ah!" said the chaplain hopefully.

"I feel right on top."

The chaplain's spirit drooped.

"Do you mean," he said, "that you don't regret—that you aren't—er——?"

"Priceless!"

The man's face had a lamentable look—steely, strangely smiling. No humility in it at all. He would find Society did not tolerate such an attitude. No, indeed! He would soon discover his place.

"I'm afraid," he said kindly, "that you'll find Society very unforgiving. Have you a family?"

"Wife, son, and daughter."

"How will they receive you?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"And your friends? I only want to prepare you a little."

"Fortunately I have private means."

The chaplain stared. What a piece of luck, or was it—a misfortune?

"If I'd been breakable, your prison would have broken me all right. Have another cigarette?"

"No, thank you."

The chaplain felt too sad. He had always said nothing could be done with them so long as their will-power was unbroken. Distressing to see a man who had received this great lesson still so stiff-necked; so far from profiting by it. And, lifting his journal, he tried to read. But those eyes seemed boring through the print. It was most uncomfortable. Most! . . .

II

1 §

In the withdrawing-room of a small house near Kew Gardens, Mrs. Philip Raider was gazing at a piece of pinkish paper in her hand, as if it had been one of those spiders of which she had so constitutional a horror. Opposite her chair her son had risen; and against the wall her daughter had ceased suddenly to play Brahms' Variations on a theme by Haydn.

"He says to-night!"

The girl dropped her hands from the keys. "To-night? I thought it was next month. Just like father—without a word of warning!"

The son mechanically took out his pipe, and began polishing its bowl. He was fresh-faced, fair, with a small head.

"Why didn't he tell us to meet him in London? He must know we've got to come to an arrangement."

The daughter, too, got up, leaning against the piano—a slight figure, with bushy, dark, short hair.

"What are we to do, Mother?"

"Jack must go round, and put Mabel and Roderick off for this evening."

"Yes, and what then, if he's going to stay here? Does he know that I'm engaged, and Beryl too?"

"I think I told him in my last letter."

"What are *you* going to do, Mother?"

"It's come so suddenly—I don't know."

"It's indecent!" said the boy violently.

His sister picked up the dropped telegram. "'Earl's Court, five four.' He may be here any minute. Jack, do hurry up! Doesn't he *realise* that nobody knows, down here?"

Mrs. Raider turned to the fire.

"Your father will only have realised his own feelings."

"Well, he's got to begin with others. I'll have to make him——!"

"Dr. Raider, ma'am."

Late—299 stood, smiling, in front of the door which the maid had closed behind him.

"Well, Bertha! Ah, Beryl! Well, Jack!"

His daughter alone replied.

"*Well,* Father, you might have let us know beforehand!"

Late—299 looked from one face to the other.

"Never tell children they're going to have a powder. How are you all?"

"Perfectly well, thank you. How are you?"

"Never better. Healthy life—prison!"

As if walking in her sleep Mrs. Raider came across the room. She put out her hand with a groping gesture. Late—299 did not take it.

"Rather nice here," he said. "Can I have a wash?"

"Jack, show your father the lavatory."

"The bathroom, please."

The son crossed from the window, glanced at his father's smiling face, and led the way.

Mrs. Raider, thin, pale, dark, spoke first. "Poor Philip!"

"Oh, Mother! It's impossible to pity father; it always was. Except for his moustache being gone, I don't see much change anyway. It's you I pity. He simply can't stay here. Why, everybody thinks you're a widow."

"People generally know more than they seem to, Beryl."

"Nobody's ever given us a hint. Why couldn't he have consulted us?"

"We must think of *him*."

"He didn't think of us when he did that horrible thing. And it was so gratuitous, unless——! Mother, sometimes I've thought he had to do it; that he was her—her lover as well as her doctor!"

Mrs. Raider shook her head.

"If it had been that, he'd have told me. Your father is always justified in his own eyes."

"What am I to do about Roddy?"

"We must just wait."

"Here's Jack! Well?"

"He's having a bath as hot as he can bear it. All he said was: 'This is the first thing you do when you go in, and the first thing you do when you come out—symmetrical, isn't it?' I've got to take him a cup of coffee. It's really too thick! The servants can't help knowing that a Dr. Raider who gets into the bath the moment he comes to call must be our father."

"It's comic."

"Is it? He doesn't show a sign of shame. He'll call it from the house-tops. I thought, of course, he'd go abroad."

"We all thought that."

"If he were down in the mouth, one could feel sorry for him. But he looks as pleased as Punch with himself. And it's such a beastly sort of crime—how am I to put it to Mabel? If I just say he's been in prison, she'll think it's something even worse. Mother, do insist on his going at once. We can tell the servants he's an uncle—who's been in contact with smallpox."

"*You* take him the coffee, Mother—oh, you can't, if he's to be an uncle! Jack, tell him nobody here knows, and mother can't stand it; and hurry up! It's half-past six now."

The son passed his fingers through his brushed-back hair; his face looked youthful, desperate.

"Shall I?"

Mrs. Raider nodded.

"Tell him, Jack, that I'll come out to him, wherever he likes to go; that I always expected him to arrange that; that this is—too difficult——" She covered her lips with her hand.

"All right, Mother! I'll jolly well make him understand. But don't launch out about it to the servants yet. Suppose it's we who have to go? It's his house!"

"Is it, Mother?"

"Yes; I bought it with his money under the power of attorney he left."

"Oh, isn't that dreadful?"

"It's *all* dreadful, but we must consider *him*."

The girl shook back her fuzzy hair.

"It does seem rather a case of 'coldly received.' But father's always been shut up in himself. He can't expect us suddenly to slobber over him. If he's had a horrible time, so have we."

"Well, shall I go?"

"Yes, take him the coffee. Be quick, my dear boy; and be nice to him!"

The son said with youthful grimness: "Oh, I'll be nice!" and went.

"Mother, don't look like that!"

"How should I look? Smiling?"

"No, don't smile—it's like *him*. Cry it off your chest."

2 §

Late—299 was sitting in the bath, smiling through steam and the smoke of his cigarette at his big toe. Raised just above the level of the water, it had a nail blackened by some weight that had dropped on it. He took the coffee-cup from his son's hand.

"For two years and nine months I've been looking forward to this—but it beats the band, Jack."

"Father—I—ought——"

"Good coffee, tobacco, hot water—greatest blessings earth affords. Half an hour in here, and—spotless, body and soul!"

"Father——!"

"Yes; is there anything you want to add?"

"We've—we've been here two years."

"Not so long as I was there. Do you like it?"

"Yes."

"I didn't. Are you studying medicine?"

"No. Botany."

"Good. You won't have to do with human beings."

"I've got the promise of a job in the Gardens here at the beginning of next year. And I'm—I'm engaged."

"Excellent. I believe in marrying young."

"Beryl's engaged too."

"Your mother isn't, by any chance?"

"Father!"

"My dear fellow, one expects to have been dropped. Why suppose one's family superior to other people's? *Pas si bête!*"

Gazing at that smiling face where prison pallor was yielding to the heat, above the neck whose sinews seemed unnaturally sharp and visible, the boy felt a spasm of remorse.

"We've never had a proper chance to tell you how frightfully sorry we've been for you. Only, we don't understand even now why you did such a thing."

"Should I have done it if I'd thought it would have been spotted? A woman going to the devil; a small risk to oneself—and there we were! Never save anyone, at risk to yourself, Jack. I'm sure you agree."

The boy's face went very red. How could he ever get out what he had come to say?

"I have no intention of putting my tail between my legs. D'you mind taking this cup?"

"Will you have another, Father?"

"No, thanks. What time do you dine?"

"Half-past seven."

"You might lend me a razor. I was shaved this morning with a sort of billhook."

"I'll get you one."

Away from that smiling stranger in the bath, the boy shook himself. He must and would speak out!

When he came back with the shaving gear, his father was lying flat, deeply immersed, with closed eyes. And setting his back against the door, he blurted out: "Nobody knows down here. They think mother's a widow."

The eyes opened, the smile resumed control.

"Do you really believe that?"

"I do; I know that Mabel—the girl I'm engaged to—has no suspicion. She's coming to dinner; so is Roddy Blades—Beryl's *fiancé*."

"Mabel, and Roddy Blades—glad to know their names. Give me that big towel, there's a good fellow. I'm going to wash my head."

Handing him the towel, the boy turned. But at the door he stopped. "Father——!"

"Quite. These natural relationships are fixed, beyond redemption."

The boy turned and fled.

His mother and sister stood waiting at the foot of the stairs.

"Well?"

"It's no good. I simply can't tell him we want him to go."

"No, my dear. I understand."

"Oh! but, Mother——! Jack, you must."

"I can't; I'm going to put them off." Seizing his hat, he ran. He ran among small houses in the evening mist, trying to invent. At the corner of the long row of little villas he rang a bell.

"Can I see Miss Mabel?"

"She's dressing, sir. Will you come in?"

"No. I'll wait here."

In the small dark porch he tried to rehearse himself. 'Awfully sorry! Somebody had come—unexpectedly—on business!' Yes! On what business?

"Hallo, Jack!"

A vision in the doorway—a fair head, a rosy, round, blue-eyed face above a swansdown collar.

"Look here, darling—shut the door."

"Why? What is it? Anything up?"

"Yes; something pretty badly up. You can't come to-night, Mabel."

"Don't squeeze so hard! Why not?"

"Oh! well—there—there's a reason."

"I know. Your father's come out!"

"What? How——?"

"But of course. We all know about him. We must be awfully nice to him."

"D'you mean to say that Roddy and everybody—— We thought nobody knew."

"Bless you, yes! Some people feel one way and some the other. I feel the other."

"Do you know what he did?"

"Yes; I got hold of the paper. I read the whole trial."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't *you?*"

"It was too beastly. Well?"

"I think it was a shame."

"But you can't have that sort of thing allowed."

"Why not?"

"Where would the population be?"

"Well, we're over-populated. Everybody says so."

"That's quite another thing. This is the Law."

"Look here! If you want to argue, come in. It's jolly cold."

"I don't want to argue; I must go and tell Roddy. It's an awful relief about you, darling. Only—you don't know my father."

"Then I can't come?"

"Not to-night. Mother——"

"Yes; I expect she's frightfully glad."

"Oh! yes—yes! She—yes!"

"Well, good-night. And look here—you go back. *I'll* tell Roddy. No! Don't rumple me!"

Running back between small houses, the boy thought: 'Good God! How queer! How upside-down! She—she——! It's awfully modern!'

3 §

Late—299 sat in the firelight, a glass beside him, a cigarette between his smiling lips. The cinders clicked, a clock struck. Eleven! He pitched the stump of his cigarette into the ashes, stretched himself, and rose. He went upstairs and opened the first door. The room was dark. A faint voice said:

"Philip?"

"Yes."

The light sprang out under his thumb. His wife was sitting up in bed, her face pale, her lips moving:

"To-night—must you?"

Late—299 moved to the foot of the bed; his lips still smiled, his eyes gazed hungrily.

"Not at all. We learn to contain ourselves in prison. No vile contacts? Quite so. Good-night!"

The voice from the bed said faintly:

"Philip, I'm so sorry; it's the suddenness—I'm——"

"Don't mention it." The light failed under his thumb. The door fell to . . .

Three people lay awake, one sleeping. The three who lay awake were thinking: 'If only he made one feel sorry for him! If only one could love him! His self-control is forbidding—it's not human! He ought to want our sympathy. He ought to sympathise with us. He doesn't seem to feel—for himself, for us, for anything. And to-morrow—what will happen? Is life possible here, now? Can we stand him in the house, about the place? He's frightening!'

The sleeper, in his first bed of one thousand and one nights, lay, his eyes pinched up between brows and bony cheeks of a face as if carved from ivory, and his lips still smiling at the softness under him.

Past dawn the wakeful slept, the sleeper awoke. His eyes sought the familiar little pyramid of gear on the shelf in the corner, the bright tins below, the round porthole, the line of distemper running along the walls, the closed and solid smallness of a

cell. And the blood left his heart. They weren't there! His whole being struggled with such unreality. He was in a room staring at light coming through chintz curtains. His arms were not naked. This was a sheet! For a moment he shivered, uncertain of everything; then lay back, smiling at a papered ceiling.

III

1 §

"It can't go on, Mother. It simply can't. I feel an absolute worm whenever I'm with him. I shall have to clear out, like Beryl. He has just one object all the time—to make everyone feel small and mean."

"Remember what he's been through!"

"I don't see why *we* should be part of his revenge. We've done nothing, except suffer through him."

"He doesn't want to hurt us or anyone."

"Well, whenever people talk to him they dry up at once, as if he'd skinned them. It's a disease."

"One can only pity him."

"He's perfectly happy, Mother. He's getting his own back."

"If only that first night——"

"We tried. It's no good. He's absolutely self-sufficient. What about to-morrow night?"

"We can't leave him on Christmas Day, Jack."

"Then we must take him to Beryl's. I can't stick it here. Look! He's just going out!"

Late—299 passed the window where they stood, loping easily, a book under his arm.

"He must have seen us. We mightn't exist! . . ."

2 §

Late—299, with the book under his arm, entered Kew Gardens and sat down on a bench. A nursery governess with her charges came and settled down beside him.

"Peter, Joan, and Michael," said Late—299, "quite in the fashion, for names."

The governess stirred uneasily; the gentleman looked funny, smiling there!

"And what are you teaching them?"

"Reading, writing, and arithmetic, sir, and Bible stories."

"Intelligent? . . . Ah! Not very. Truthful? . . . No! No children are."

The governess twisted her hands. "Peter!" she said, "where's your ball? We must go and look for it."

"But I've got it, Miss Somers."

"Oh, well, it's too sharp, sitting here. Come along!"

She passed away, and Peter, Joan, and Michael trailed after her.

Late—299 smiled on; and a Pekinese, towing a stout old lady, smelled at his trousers.

"It's my cat," said Late—299. "Dogs and cats their pleasure is——"

Picking up the Pekinese, the stout old lady pressed it under her arm as though it were a bagpipe, and hurried on like a flustered goose.

Some minutes passed. A workman and his wife sat down beside him, and gazed at the Pagoda.

"Queer building!" said Late—299.

"Ah!" said the workman. "Japanese, they say!"

"Chinese, my friend. Good people, the Chinese —no regard for human life."

"What's that? Good—did you say?"

"Quite!"

"Eh?"

The workman's wife peered round him.

"Come on, John! The sun gits in me eyes 'ere."

The workman rose. "'Good,' you said, didn't you? *Good* people?"

"Yes."

The workman's wife drew at his arm. "There, don't get arguin' with strangers. Come on!" The workman was drawn away. . . .

A clock struck twelve. Late—299 got up and left the Gardens. Walking between small houses, he rang at the side entrance of a little shop.

"If your father's still blind—I've come to read to him again."

"Please, sir, he'll always be."

"So I supposed."

On a horsehair sofa, below the dyed-red plumes of pampas grass, a short and stocky man was sitting, whittling at a wooden figure. He sniffed, and turned his sightless eyes towards his visitor; his square face in every line and bump seemed saying: 'You don't down me.'

"What are you making?" said Late—299.

"Christmas Eve. I'm cuttin' out our Lord. I make 'em rather nice. Would you like this one?"

"Thank you."

"Kep' His end up well, our Lord, didn't He? 'Love your neighbour as yourself'—that means you got to love yourself. And He did, I think; not against Him, neither."

"Easier to love your neighbours when you can't see them, eh?"

"What's that? D'you mind lendin' me your face a minute? It'll help me a lot with this 'ere. I make 'em lifelike, you know."

Late—299 leaned forward, and the tips of the blind man's fingers explored his features.

"'Igh cheekbones, eyes back in the 'ead, supra-orbital ridges extra special, rather low forehead slopin' to thick hair. Comin' down, two 'ollers under the cheekbones, thin nose a bit 'ooky, chin sharpish, no moustache. You've got a smile, 'aven't you? And your own teeth? I should say you'd make a very good model. I don't 'old with 'Im always 'avin' a beard. Would you like the figure 'angin', or carryin' the cross?"

"As you wish. D'you ever use your own face?"

"Not for 'Im—for statesmen or 'eroes I do. I done one of Captain Scott with my face. Rather pugnacious, my style; yours is sharp, bit acid, suitable to saints, martyrs, and that. I'll just go over you once more—then I'll 'ave it all 'ere. Sharp neck; bit 'unchy in one shoulder; ears stick up a bit; tallish thin man, ain't you, and throw your feet forward when you walk? Give us your 'and a minute. Bite your fingers, I see. Eyes blue, eh—with pin-points to 'em—yes? Hair a bit reddish before it went piebald—that right?

Thank you, much obliged. Now, if you like to read, I'll get on with it."

Late—299 opened the book.

. . . "'But at last in the drift of time Hadleyburg had the ill-luck to offend a passing stranger, possibly without knowing it, certainly without caring, for Hadleyburg was sufficient unto itself and cared not a rap for strangers and their opinions. Still, it would have been well to make an exception in this one's case, for he was a bitter man and revengeful.'"

"Ah!" interjected the blind man deeply, "there you 'ave it. Talkin' of feelin's, what gave you a fellow-feelin' for me, if I may ask?"

"I can look at you, my friend, without your seeing me."

"Eh! What about it with other people, then?"

"They can look at me without my seeing them."

"I see! Misanthropical. Any reason for that?"

"Prison."

"What oh! Outcast and rejected of men."

"No. The other way on."

The blind man ceased to whittle and scoop.

"I like independence," he said; "I like a man that can go his own way. Ever noticed cats? Men are like dogs, mostly; only once in a way you get a man that's like a cat. What *were* you, if it's not a rude question. In the taxes?"

"Medico."

"What's a good thing for 'eartburn?"

"Which kind?"

"Wind, ain't it? But I see your meanin'. Losin' my sight used to burn my 'eart a lot; but I got over that. What's the use? You couldn't have any worse misfortune. It gives you a feelin' of bein' insured—like."

"You're right," said Late—299, rising to go.

The blind man lifted his face in unison. "Got your smile on?" he said. "Just let me 'ave another feel at it, will you?"

Late—299 bent to the outstretched fingers.

"Yes," said the blind man, "same with you—touched bottom. Next time you come I'll 'ave something on show that'll please you, I think; and thank you for readin'."

"Let me know if it bores you."

"I will," said the blind man, following without movement the footsteps of his visitor that died away.

3 §

Christmas night—wild and windy, a shower spattering down in the street; Late—299 walking two yards before his wife, their son walking two yards behind his mother. A light figure, furred to the ears, in a doorway watching for them.

"Come along, darling. Sorry we had to bring him."

"Of course you had to, Jack!"

"Look! He can't even walk with mother. It's a disease. He went to church to-day, and all through the sermon never took his eyes off—the poor old vicar nearly broke down."

"What was it about?"

"Brotherly love. Mother says he doesn't mean it—but it's like—what's that thing that stares?"

"A basilisk. I've been trying to put myself in his place, Jack. He must have swallowed blood and tears in there—ordered about like a dog, by common men, for three years nearly. If you don't go under, you must become inhuman. This is better than if he'd come out crawling."

"Perhaps. Look out—the rain! I'll turn your hood up, darling." A spattering shower, the whispering hushed. . . .

A lighted open doorway, a red hall, a bunch of hanging mistletoe, a girl beneath, with bushy hair.

"Happy Christmas, Father!"

"Thanks. Do you want to be kissed?"

"As you like. Well, Mother darling! Hallo, you two! Come in! Roddy, take father's coat."

"How are you, sir? Beastly weather!"

"That was the advantage we had in prison.

Weather never troubled us. 'Peace and Goodwill' in holly-berries! Very neat! They used to stick them up in there. Christianity is a really remarkable fraud, don't you think?". . .

Once again those four in the street; and the bells chiming for midnight service.

"What an evening!"

"Let them get out of hearing, Jack."

"Worse than ever! My God, he'd turn the milk sour! And I thought liquor might make him possible. He drank quite a lot."

"Only a few days now, and then! . . ."

"Do you agree with mother that he doesn't mean it, Mabel?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

"The way he sits and smiles! Why doesn't he get himself a desert to smile in?"

"Perhaps he does . . ."

4 §

"'Ere you are!" said the blind man. "Best I can do under the circs. 'Ad a bit o' trouble with the cross; got it too 'eavy, I'm afraid; but thought you'd rather carry it."

"Quite a masterpiece!"

"Speaking serious?" said the blind man. "You

could improve it with a box o' colours; make it more 'uman-like."

"I'll do that."

"I wouldn't touch the face, nor the cross—leave 'em wooden; but the hair and the dress, and the blood from the crown o' thorns might be all the better for a bit o' brightenin'. How's the man that corrupted 'Adleyburg?"

Late—299 opened the book.

"'. . . Goodson looked him over, like as if he was hunting for a place on him that he could despise the most; then he says: "So you are the Committee of Enquiry, are you?" Sawlsberry said that was about what he was. "H'm! Do they require particulars, or do you reckon a kind of *general* answer will do?" "If they require particulars I will come back, Mr. Goodson; I will take the general answer first." "Very well, then; tell them to go to hell—I reckon that's general enough. And I'll give you some advice, Sawlsberry; when you come back for the particulars, fetch a basket to carry what's left of yourself home in.'"

The blind man chuckled.

"Ah! I like that Mark Twain. Nice sense o' humour—nothin' sickly."

"Bark and quinine, eh?"

"Bark and bite," said the blind man. "What do you think of 'uman nature yourself?"

"Little or nothing."

"And yet there's a bit of all right about it, too. Look at you and me; we got our troubles; and 'ere we are—jolly as sandboys! Be self-sufficient, or you've got to suffer. That's what you feel, ain't it? Am I mistook, or did you nod?"

"I did. Your eyes look as if they saw."

"Bright, are they? You and me could 'ave sat down and cried 'em out any time—couldn't we? But we didn't. That's why I say there's a bit of all right about us. Put the world from you, and keep your pecker up. When you can't think worse of things than what you do, you'll be 'appy—not before. That's right, ain't it?"

"Quite."

"Took me five years. 'Ow long were you about it?"

"Nearly three."

"Well, you 'ad the advantage of birth and edjucation; I can tell that from your voice—got a thin, mockin' sound. *I* started in a barber's shop; got mine in an accident with some 'air-curlers. What I miss most is not bein' able to go fishin'. No one to take me. Don't you miss cuttin' people up?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose a gent never gets a passion; I'd a perfect passion for fishin'. Never missed Sunday, wet or fine. That's why I learned this carvin'—must 'ave an 'obby to go on with. Are you goin' to write your 'istory? Am I wrong, or did you shake your 'ead?"

"I did. My hobby is watching the show go by."

"That might 'ave suited me at one time—always liked to see the river flowin' down. I'm a bit of a philosopher myself. You ain't, I should say."

"Why not?"

"Well, I've a fancy you want life to come to heel too much—misfortune of bein' a gent, perhaps. Am I right?"

Late—299 closed the book and rose. "Pride!" he said.

"Ah!" said the blind man, groping with his eyes, "that's meat and drink to you. Thought as much. Come again, if I don't worry you."

"And take you fishing?"

"Reelly? You will? Shake 'ands."

Late—299 put out his hand. The blind man's groped up and found it. . . .

5 §

"Wednesday again, is it, partner, if I'm not troublin' you?"

"Wednesday it is."

At the door of his house, with the 'catch' in a straw bag, the blind man stood a minute listening to his partner's footsteps, then felt his way in to his horsehair sofa under the pampas grass. Putting his cold feet up under the rug, he heaved a sigh of satisfaction, and fell asleep.

Between the bare acacias and lilac-bushes of the little villas Late—299 passed on. Entering his house, he sought his study, and stretched his feet towards the fire, and the cat, smelling him fishy, sprang on to his knee.

"Philip, may I come in?"

"You may."

"The servants have given notice. I wanted to say, wouldn't you like to give this up and go abroad with me?"

"Why this sudden sacrifice?"

"Oh, Philip! You make it so hard for me. What do you really want me to do?"

"Take half my income, and go away."

"What will you do, here, alone?"

"Get me a char. The cat and I love chars."

"Philip!"

"Yes?"

"Won't you tell me what's in your heart? Do you want always to be lonely like this?"

Late—299 looked up.

"Reality means nothing to those who haven't lived with it. I do."

"But why?"

"My dear Bertha—that is your name, I think?"

"Oh, God! You *are* terrible!"

"What would you have me—a whining worm? Crawling to people I despise—squirming from false position to false position? Do you want humility; what is it you want?"

"I want you to be human."

"Then you want what you have got. I *am* so human that I'll see the world damned before I take its pity, or eat its salt. Leave me alone. I am content."

"Is there nothing I can do?"

"Yes; stand out of my firelight. . . ."

6 §

Two figures, in the dark outside, before the uncurtained window.

"Look, Mabel!"

"Be careful! He may see. Whisper!"

"The window's shut."

"Oh, why doesn't he draw the blinds—if he must sit like that?"

"'*A desert dark without a sound. . . .*
And not a drop to eat or drink
And a dark desert all around!'

Jack, I pity him."

"He doesn't suffer. It's being fond of people makes you suffer. He's got all he wants. Look at him."

The firelight on the face—its points and hollows, its shining eyes, its stillness and intensity, its smile; and on the cat, hunched and settled in the curve of the warm body. And the two young people, shrinking back, pass on between small houses, clutching each other's hands.

1923.

HAD A HORSE

I

Some quarter of a century ago, there abode in Oxford a small bookmaker called James Shrewin—or more usually 'Jimmy'—a run-about and damped-down little man, who made a precarious living out of the effect of horses on undergraduates. He had a so-called office just off the 'Corn,' where he was always open to the patronage of the young bloods of Bullingdon, and other horse-loving coteries, who bestowed on him sufficient money to enable him to live. It was through the conspicuous smash of one of them—young Gardon Colquhoun—that he became the owner of a horse. He had been far from wanting what was in the nature of a white elephant to one of his underground habits, but had taken it in discharge of betting debts, to which, of course, in the event of bankruptcy, he would have no legal claim. She was a three-year old chestnut filly, by Lopez out of Calendar, bore the name of Calliope, and was trained out on the Downs near Wantage. On a Sunday afternoon, then, in late July, 'Jimmy' got his friend, George

Pulcher, the publican, to drive him out there in his sort of dog-cart.

"Must 'ave a look at the bilkin' mare," he had said; "that young 'Cocoon' told me she was a corker; but what's third to Referee at Sandown, and never ran as a two-year-old? All I know is, she's eatin' 'er 'ead off!"

Beside the plethoric bulk of Pulcher, clad in a light-coloured box-cloth coat with enormous whitish buttons and a full-blown rose in the lapel, 'Jimmy's' little, thin, dark-clothed form, withered by anxiety and gin, was, as it were, invisible; and compared with Pulcher's setting sun, his face, with shaven cheeks sucked in, and smudged-in eyes, was like a ghost's under a grey bowler. He spoke off-handedly about his animal, but he was impressed, in a sense abashed, by his ownership. 'What the 'ell?' was his constant thought. Was he going to race her, sell her—what? How, indeed, to get back out of her the sum he had been fool enough to let young 'Cocoon' owe him, to say nothing of her trainer's bill? The notion, too, of having to confront that trainer with his ownership was oppressive to one whose whole life was passed in keeping out of the foreground of the picture. Owner! He had never owned even a white mouse, let alone a white elephant. And an 'orse

would ruin him in no time if he didn't look alive about it!

The son of a small London baker, devoted to errandry at the age of fourteen, 'Jimmy' Shrewin owed his profession to a certain smartness at sums, a dislike of baking, and an early habit of hanging about street corners with other boys, who had their daily pennies on an 'orse. He had a narrow, calculating head, which pushed him towards street corner books before he was eighteen. From that time on he had been a surreptitious nomad, till he had silted up at Oxford, where, owing to Vice-Chancellors, an expert in underground life had greater scope than elsewhere. When he sat solitary at his narrow table in the back room near the 'Corn'—for he had no clerk or associate—eyeing the door, with his lists in a drawer before him, and his black shiny betting-book ready for young 'bloods,' he had a sharp, cold, furtive air, and but for a certain imitated tightness of trouser, and a collar standing up all round, gave no impression of ever having heard of the quadruped called horse. Indeed, for 'Jimmy' 'horse' was a newspaper quantity with figures against its various names. Even when, for a short spell, hanger-on to a firm of Cheap Ring bookmakers, he had seen almost nothing of horse; his racecourse hours were spent

ferreting among a bawling, perspiring crowd, or hanging round within earshot of tight-lipped nobs, trainers, jockeys, anyone who looked like having 'information.' Nowadays he never went near a race-meeting—his business, of betting on races, giving him no chance—yet his conversation seldom deviated for more than a minute at a time from that physically unknown animal, the horse. The ways of making money out of it, infinite, intricate, variegated, occupied the mind in all his haunts, to the accompaniment of liquid and tobacco. Gin and bitters was 'Jimmy's' drink; for choice he smoked cheroots; and he would cherish in his mouth the cold stump of one long after it had gone out, for the homely feeling it gave him, while he talked, or listened to talk on horses. He was of that vast number, town bred, who, like crows round a carcase, feed on that which to them is not alive. And now he had a horse!

The dog-cart travelled at a clinking pace behind Pulcher's bobtail. 'Jimmy's' cheroot burned well in the warm July air; the dust powdered his dark clothes and pinched, sallow face. He thought with malicious pleasure of that young spark 'Cocoon's' collapse—high-'anded lot of young fools, thinking themselves so knowing; many were the grins, and not few the grittings of his blackened teeth he had

to smother at their swagger. 'Jimmy, you robber!' 'Jimmy, you little blackguard!' Young sparks—gay and languid—well, one of 'em had gone out!

He looked round with his screwed-up eyes at his friend George Pulcher, who, man and licensed victualler, had his bally independence; lived remote from 'the Quality' in his paradise, the Green Dragon; had not to kowtow to anyone; went to Newbury, Gatwick, Stockbridge, here and there, at will. Ah! George Pulcher had the ideal life—and looked it: crimson, square, full-bodied. Judge of a horse, too, in his own estimation; a leery bird—for whose judgment 'Jimmy' had respect—who got 'the office' of any clever work as quick as most men! And he said:

"What am I going to do with this blinkin' 'orse, George?"

Without moving its head the oracle spoke in a voice rich and raw: "Let's 'ave a look at her first, Jimmy! Don't like her name—Callĭōpe; but you can't change what's in the Stud-book. This Jenning that trains 'er is a crusty chap."

'Jimmy' nervously sucked-in his lips. The cart was mounting through the hedgeless fields which fringed the Downs; larks were singing, the wheat was very green, the patches of charlock brightened everything; it was lonely, few trees,

few houses, no people, extreme peace, just a few rooks crossing under a blue sky.

"Wonder if he'll offer us a drink?" said 'Jimmy.'

"Not he; but help yourself, my son."

'Jimmy' helped himself from a large wicker-covered flask.

"Good for you, George—here's how!"

The large man shifted the reins and drank, in turn, tilting up a face whose jaw still struggled to assert itself against chins and neck.

"Well, here's to your bloomin' horse," he said. "She can't win the Derby now, but she may do us a bit of good yet."

II

The trainer, Jenning, coming from his Sunday afternoon round of the boxes, heard the sound of wheels. He was a thin man, neat in clothes and boots, medium in height, with a slight limp, narrow grey whiskers, thin shaven lips, eyes sharp and grey.

A dog-cart stopping at his yard-gate; and a rum-looking couple of customers!

"Well, gentlemen?"

"Mr. Jenning? My name's Pulcher—George

Pulcher. Brought a client of yours over to see his new mare. Mr. James Shrewin, Oxford city."

'Jimmy' got down and stood before his trainer's uncompromising stare.

"What mare's that?" said Jenning.

"Callĭōpe."

"Callĭōpĕ—Mr. Colquhoun's?"

'Jimmy' held out a letter.

"DEAR JENNING,

"I have sold Calliope to Jimmy Shrewin, the Oxford bookie. He takes her with all engagements and liabilities, including your training bill. I'm frightfully sick at having to part with her, but needs must when the devil drives.

"GARDON COLQUHOUN."

The trainer folded the letter.

"Got proof of registration?"

'Jimmy' drew out another paper.

The trainer inspected it, and called out: "Ben, bring out Calliope. Excuse me a minute," and he walked into his house.

'Jimmy' stood, shifting from leg to leg. Mortification had set in; the dry abruptness of the trainer had injured even a self-esteem starved from youth.

The voice of Pulcher boomed. "Told you he was a crusty devil. 'And 'im a bit of his own."

The trainer was coming back.

"My bill," he said. "When you've paid it you can have the mare. I train for gentlemen."

"The hell you do!" said Pulcher.

'Jimmy' said nothing, staring at the bill. Seventy-eight pounds three shillings! A buzzing fly settled in the hollow of his cheek, and he did not even brush it off. Seventy-eight pound!

The sound of hoofs roused him. Here came his horse, throwing up her head as if enquiring why she was being disturbed a second time on Sunday! In the movement of that small head and satin neck was something free and beyond present company.

"There she is," said the trainer. "That'll do, Ben. Stand, girl!"

Answering to a jerk or two of the halter, the mare stood kicking slightly with a white hind foot and whisking her tail. Her bright coat shone in the sunlight, and little shivers and wrinklings passed up and down its satin because of the flies. Then, for a moment, she stood still, ears pricked, eyes on the distance.

'Jimmy' approached her. She had resumed her twitchings, swishings, and slight kicking, and at a respectful distance he circled, bending as if looking at crucial points. He knew what her sire and dam had done, and all the horses that had beaten or been beaten by them; could have

retailed by the half-hour the peculiar hearsay of their careers; and here was their offspring in flesh and blood, and he was dumb! He didn't know a thing about what she ought to look like, and he knew it; but he felt obscurely moved. She seemed to him 'a picture.'

Completing his circle, he approached her head, white-blazed, thrown up again in listening, or scenting, and gingerly he laid his hand on her neck, warm and smooth as a woman's shoulder. She paid no attention to his touch, and he took his hand away. Ought he to look at her teeth or feel her legs? No, he was not buying her, she was his already; but he must say something. He looked round. The trainer was watching him with a little smile. For almost the first time in his life the worm turned in 'Jimmy' Shrewin; he spoke no word and walked back to the cart.

"Take her in," said Jenning.

From his seat beside Pulcher, 'Jimmy' watched the mare returning to her box.

"When I've cashed your cheque," said the trainer, "you can send for her;" and, turning on his heel, he went towards his house. The voice of Pulcher followed him.

"Blast your impudence! Git on, bobtail, we'll shake the dust off 'ere."

Among the fringing fields the dog-cart hurried away. The sun slanted, the heat grew less, the colour of young wheat and of the charlock brightened.

"The tyke! By Gawd, Jimmy, I'd 'ave hit him on the mug! But you've got one there. She's a bit o' blood, my boy; and I know the trainer for her, Polman—no blasted airs about 'im."

'Jimmy' sucked at his cheroot.

"I ain't had your advantages, George, and that's a fact. I got into it too young, and I'm a little chap. But I'll send the —— my cheque to-morrow. I got my pride, I 'ope." It was the first time that thought had ever come to him.

III

Though not quite the centre of the Turf, the Green Dragon had nursed a *coup* in its day, nor was it without a sense of veneration. The ownership of Calliope invested 'Jimmy' Shrewin with the importance of those out of whom something can be had. It took time for one so long accustomed to beck and call, to mole-like procedure, and the demeanour of young bloods, to realise that he had it. But slowly, with the marked increase of his unpaid-for cheroots, with the way in which glasses

hung suspended when he came in, with the edgings up to him, and a certain tendency to accompany him along the street, it dawned on him that he was not only an out-of-bounds bookie, but a man. So long as he had remained unconscious of his double nature he had been content with laying the odds, as best he might, and getting what he could out of every situation, straight or crooked. Now that he was also a man, his complacency was ruffled. He suffered from a growing headiness connected with his horse. She was trained, now, by Polman, further along the Downs, too far for Pulcher's bobtail; and though her public life was carried on at the Green Dragon, her private life required a train journey over night. 'Jimmy' took it twice a week—touting his own horse in the August mornings up on the Downs, without drink or talk, or even cheroots. Early morning, larks singing, and the sound of galloping hoofs! In a moment of expansion he confided to Pulcher that it was 'bally 'olesome.'

There had been the slight difficulty of being mistaken for a tout by his new trainer, Polman, a stoutish man with the look of one of those large sandy Cornish cats, not precisely furtive because reticence and craft are their nature. But, that once over, his personality swelled slowly. This month

of August was one of those interludes, in fact, when nothing happens, but which shape the future by secret ripening.

An error to suppose that men conduct finance, high or low, from greed, or love of gambling; they do it out of self-esteem, out of an itch to prove their judgment superior to their neighbours', out of a longing for importance. George Pulcher did not despise the turning of a penny, but he valued much more the consciousness that men were saying: "Old George, what 'e says goes—knows a thing or two—George Pulcher!"

To pull the strings of 'Jimmy' Shrewin's horse was a rich and subtle opportunity absorbingly improvable. But first one had to study the animal's engagements, and, secondly, to gauge that unknown quantity, her 'form.' To make anything of her this year they must 'get about it.' That young 'toff,' her previous owner, had, of course, flown high, entering her for classic races, high-class handicaps, neglecting the rich chances of lesser occasions.

Third to Referee in the three-year-old race at Sandown Spring—two heads—was all that was known of her, and now they had given her seven two in the Cambridgeshire. She might have a chance, and again she might not. He sat two

long evenings with 'Jimmy' in the little private room off the bar, deliberating this grave question.

'Jimmy' inclined to the bold course. He kept saying: "The mare's a flyer, George—she's the 'ell of a flyer!"

"Wait till she's been tried," said the oracle.

Had Polman anything that would give them a line?

Yes, he had The Shirker (named with that irony which appeals to the English), one of the most honest four-year-olds that ever looked through bridle, who had run up against almost every animal of mark—the one horse that Polman never interfered with, or interrupted in his training lest he should run all the better; who seldom won, but was almost always placed—the sort of horse that handicappers pivot on.

"But," said Pulcher, "try her with The Shirker, and the first stable money will send her up to tens. That 'orse is so darned regular. We've got to throw a bit of dust first, 'Jimmy.' I'll go over and see Polman."

In 'Jimmy's' withered chest a faint resentment rose—it wasn't George's horse; but it sank again beneath his friend's bulk and reputation.

The 'bit of dust' was thrown at the ordinary hour of exercise over the Long Mile on the last day

of August—the five-year-old Hangman carrying eight stone seven, the three-year-old Parrot seven stone five; what Calliope was carrying nobody but Polman knew. The forethought of George Pulcher had secured the unofficial presence of the Press. The instructions to the boy on Calliope were to be there at the finish if he could, but on no account to win. 'Jimmy' and George Pulcher had come out over night. They sat together in the dog-cart by the clump of bushes which marked the winning-post, with Polman on his cob on the far side.

By a fine, warm light the three horses were visible to the naked eye in the slight dip down by the start. And, through the glasses, invested in now that he had a horse, 'Jimmy' could see every movement of his mare with her blazed face—rather on her toes, like the bright chestnut and 'bit o' blood' she was. He had a pit-patting in his heart, and his lips were tight-pressed. Suppose she was no good after all, and that young 'Cocoon' had palmed him off a pup! But mixed in with his financial fear was an anxiety more intimate, as if his own value were at stake.

From George Pulcher came an almost excited gurgle.

"See the tout! See 'im behind that bush. Thinks we don't know 'e's there, wot oh!"

'Jimmy' bit into his cheroot. "They're running," he said.

Rather wide, the black Hangman on the far side, Calliope in the middle, they came sweeping up the Long Mile. 'Jimmy' held his tobaccoed breath. The mare was going freely—a length or two behind—making up her ground! Now for it!

Ah! she 'ad The 'Angman beat, and ding-dong with this Parrot! It was all he could do to keep from calling out. With a rush and a cludding of hoofs they passed—the blazed nose just behind The Parrot's bay nose—dead heat all but, with The Hangman beaten a good length!

"There 'e goes, Jimmy! See the blank scuttlin' down the 'ill like a blinkin' rabbit. That'll be in to-morrow's paper, that trial will. Ah! but 'ow to read it—that's the point."

The horses had been wheeled and were sidling back; Polman was going forward on his cob.

'Jimmy' jumped down. Whatever that fellow had to say, he meant to hear. It was his horse! Narrowly avoiding the hoofs of his hot, fidgeting mare, he said sharply:

"What about it?"

Polman never looked you in the face; his speech came as if not intended to be heard by anyone:

"Tell Mr. Shrewin how she went."

"Had a bit up my sleeve. If I'd hit her a smart one, I could ha' landed by a length or more."

"That so?" said 'Jimmy' with a hiss. "Well, *don't* you hit her; she don't want hittin'. You remember that."

The boy said sulkily: "All right!"

"Take her home," said Polman. Then, with that reflective averted air of his, he added: "She was carrying eight stone, Mr. Shrewin; you've got a good one there. She's The Hangman at level weights."

Something wild leaped up in 'Jimmy'—The Hangman's form unrolled itself before him in the air—he had a horse—he dam' well had a horse!

IV

But how delicate is the process of backing your fancy! The planting of a commission—what tender and efficient work before it will flower! That sixth sense of the racing man, which, like the senses of savages in great forests, seizes telepathically on what is not there, must be dulled, duped, deluded.

George Pulcher had the thing in hand. One might have thought the gross man incapable of such a fairy touch, such power of sowing with one

hand and reaping with the other. He intimated rather than asserted that Calliope and The Parrot were one and the same thing. "The Parrot," he said, "couldn't win with seven stone—no use thinkin' of this Callĭōpe."

Local opinion was the rock on which, like a great tactician, he built. So long as local opinion was adverse, he could dribble money on in London; the natural jump-up from every long shot taken was dragged back by the careful radiation of disparagement from the seat of knowledge.

'Jimmy' was the fly in his ointment of those balmy early weeks while snapping up every penny of long odds, before suspicion could begin to work from the persistence of enquiry. Half-a-dozen times he found the 'little cuss within an ace of blowing the gaff on his own blinkin' mare'; seemed unable to run his horse down; the little beggar's head was swellin'! Once 'Jimmy' had even got up and gone out, leaving a gin and bitters untasted on the bar. Pulcher improved on his absence in the presence of a London tout.

"Saw the trial meself! Jimmy don't like to think he's got a stiff 'un."

And next morning his London agent snapped up some thirty-threes again.

According to the trial the mare was The Hangman at seven stone two, and really hot stuff—a

seven to one chance. It was none the less with a sense of outrage that, opening the *Sporting Life* on the last day of September, he found her quoted at 100—8. Whose work was this?

He reviewed the altered situation in disgust. He had invested about half the stable commission of three hundred pounds at an average of thirty to one, but, now that she had 'come' in the betting, he would hardly average tens with the rest. What fool had put his oar in?

He learned the explanation two days later. The rash, the unknown backer, was 'Jimmy'! He had acted, it appeared, from jealousy; a bookmaker—it took one's breath away!

"Backed her on your own just because that young 'Cocoon' told you he fancied her!"

'Jimmy' looked up from the table in his 'office,' where he was sitting in wait for the scanty custom of the Long Vacation.

"She's not *his* horse," he said sullenly. "I wasn't going to have *him* get the cream."

"What did you put on?" growled Pulcher.

"Took five hundred to thirty and fifteen twenties."

"An' see what it's done—knocked the bottom out of the commission. Am I to take that fifty as part of it?"

'Jimmy' nodded.

"That leaves an 'undred to invest," said Pulcher, somewhat mollified. He stood, with his mind twisting in his thick, still body. "It's no good waitin' now," he said; "I'll work the rest of the money on to-day. If I can average tens on the balance, we'll 'ave six thousand three hundred to play with and the stakes. They tell me Jenning fancies this Diamond Stud of his. *He* ought to know the form with Callĭōpe, blast him! We got to watch that."

They had! Diamond Stud, a four-year-old with eight stone two, was being backed as if the Cambridgeshire were over. From fifteens he advanced to sevens, thence to favouritism at fives. Pulcher bit on it. Jenning *must* know where he stood with Calliope! It meant—it meant she couldn't win! The tactician wasted no time in vain regret. Establish Calliope in the betting and lay off! The time had come to utilise The Shirker.

It was misty on the Downs—fine weather mist of a bright October. The three horses became spectral on their way to the starting-point. Polman had thrown The Parrot in again, but this time he made no secret of the weights. The Shirker was carrying eight seven, Calliope eight, The Parrot seven stone.

Once more, in the cart, with his glasses sweeping

the bright mist, 'Jimmy' had that pit-patting in his heart. Here they came! His mare leading—all riding hard—a genuine finish! They passed—The Shirker beaten a clear length, with the Parrot at his girth. Beside him in the cart, George Pulcher mumbled:

"She's The Shirker at eight stone four, Jimmy!"

A silent drive back to the river inn, big with thought; a silent breakfast. Over a tankard at the close the oracle spoke.

"The Shirker, at eight stone four, is a good 'ot chance, but no cert, Jimmy. We'll let 'em know this trial quite open, weights and all. That'll bring her in the betting. And we'll watch Diamond Stud. If he drops back we'll know Jenning thinks he can't beat us now. If Diamond Stud stands up we'll know Jenning thinks he's still got our mare safe. Then our line'll be clear: we lay off the lot, pick up a thousand or so, and 'ave the mare in at a nice weight at Liverpool."

'Jimmy's' smudged-in eyes stared hungrily.

"How's that?" he said. "Suppose she wins?"

"Wins! If we lay off the lot, she *won't* win."

"Pull her!"

George Pulcher's voice sank half an octave with disgust.

"Pull her! Who talked of pullin'? She'll run a bye, that's all. We shan't ever know whether she could 'a won or not."

'Jimmy' sat silent; the situation was such as his life during sixteen years had waited for. They stood to win both ways with a bit of handling.

"Who's to ride?" he said.

"Polman's got a call on Docker. He can just ride the weight. Either way he's good for us—strong finisher and a rare judge of distance; knows how to time things to a T. Win or not, he's our man."

'Jimmy' was deep in figures. Laying-off at sevens, they would still win four thousand and the stakes.

"I'd like a win," he said.

"Ah!" said Pulcher. "But there'll be twenty in the field, my son; no more uncertain race than that bally Cambridgeshire. We could pick up a thou. as easy as I pick up this pot. Bird in the 'and, Jimmy, and a good 'andicap in the bush. If she wins, she's finished. Well, we'll put this trial about and see 'ow Jenning pops."

Jenning popped amazingly. Diamond Stud receded a point, then re-established himself at nine to two. Jenning was clearly not dismayed.

George Pulcher shook his head and waited, un-

certain still which way to jump. Ironical circumstance decided him.

Term had begun; 'Jimmy' was busy at his seat of custom. By some miracle of guardianly intervention, young Colquhoun had not gone broke. He was 'up' again, eager to retrieve his reputation, and that little brute 'Jimmy' would not lay against his horse! He merely sucked-in his cheeks, and answered: "I'm not layin' my own 'orse." It was felt that he was not the man he had been; assertion had come into his manner, he was better dressed. Someone had seen him at the station looking quite a 'toff' in a blue box-cloth coat standing well out from his wisp of a figure, and with a pair of brown race-glasses slung over the shoulder. Altogether the 'little brute was getting too big for his boots.'

And this strange improvement hardened the feeling that his horse was a real good thing. Patriotism began to burn in Oxford. Here was a 'snip' that belonged to them, as it were, and the money in support of it, finding no outlet, began to ball.

A week before the race—with Calliope at nine to one, and very little doing—young Colquhoun went up to town, taking with him the accumulated support of betting Oxford. That evening she stood at sixes. Next day the public followed on.

George Pulcher took advantage. In this crisis of the proceedings he acted on his own initiative. The mare went back to eights, but the deed was done. He had laid off the whole bally lot, including the stake money. He put it to 'Jimmy' that evening in a nutshell.

"We pick up a thousand, and the Liverpool as good as in our pocket. I've done worse."

'Jimmy' grunted out: "She could 'a won."

"Not she. Jenning knows—and there's others in the race. This Wasp is goin' to take a lot of catchin', and Deerstalker's not out of it. He's a hell of a horse, even with that weight."

Again 'Jimmy' grunted, slowly sucking down his gin and bitters. Sullenly he said:

"Well, I don' want to put money in the pocket of young 'Cocoon' and his crowd. Like his impudence, backin' my horse as if it was his own."

"We'll 'ave to go and see her run, Jimmy."

"Not me," said 'Jimmy.'

"What! First time she runs! It won't look natural."

"No," repeated 'Jimmy.' "I don't want to see 'er beat."

George Pulcher laid his hand on a skinny shoulder.

"Nonsense, Jimmy. You've got to, for the

sake of your reputation. You'll enjoy seein' your mare saddled. We'll go up over night. I shall 'ave a few pound on Deerstalker. I believe he can beat this Diamond Stud. And you leave Docker to me; I'll 'ave a word with him at Gatwick to-morrow. I've known 'im since he was that 'igh; an' 'e ain't much more now."

"All right!" growled 'Jimmy.'

V

The longer you can bet on a race the greater its fascination. Handicappers can properly enjoy the beauty of their work; clubmen and oracles of the course have due scope for reminiscence and prophecy; bookmakers in lovely leisure can indulge a little their own calculated preferences, instead of being hurried to soulless conclusions by a half-hour's market on the course; the professional backer has the longer in which to dream of his fortune made at last by some hell of a horse—spotted somewhere as interfered with, left at the post, running green, too fat, not fancied, backward—now bound to win this hell of a race. And the general public has the chance to read the horses' names in the betting news for days and days; and what a comfort that is!

'Jimmy' Shrewin was not one of those philo-

sophers who justify the great and growing game of betting on the ground that it improves the breed of an animal less and less in use. He justified it much more simply—he lived by it. And in the whole of his career of nearly twenty years since he made hole-and-corner books among the boys of London, he had never stood so utterly on velvet as that morning when his horse must win him five hundred pounds by merely losing. He had spent the night in London anticipating a fraction of his gains with George Pulcher at a music-hall. And, in a first-class carriage, as became an owner, he travelled down to Newmarket by an early special. An early special key turned in the lock of the carriage door, preserved their numbers at six, all professionals, with blank, rather rolling eyes, mouths shut or slightly fishy, ears to the ground; and the only natural talker a red-faced man, who had 'been at it thirty years.' Intoning the pasts and futures of this hell of a horse or that, even he was silent on the race in hand; and the journey was half over before the beauty of their own judgments loosened tongues thereon. George Pulcher started it.

"I fancy Deerstalker," he said; "he's a hell of a horse."

"Too much weight," said the red-faced man. "What about this Calliope?"

"Ah!" said Pulcher. "D'you fancy your mare, Jimmy?"

With all eyes turned on him, lost in his blue box-cloth coat, brown bowler, and cheroot smoke, 'Jimmy' experienced a subtle thrill. Addressing the space between the red-faced man and Pulcher, he said:

"If she runs up to 'er looks."

"Ah!" said Pulcher, "she's dark—nice mare, but a bit light and shelly."

"Lopez out o' Calendar," muttered the red-faced man. "Lopez didn't stay, but he was the hell of a horse over seven furlongs. The Shirker ought to 'ave told you a bit."

'Jimmy' did not answer. It gave him pleasure to see the red-faced man's eye trying to get past, and failing.

"Nice race to pick up. Don't fancy the favourite meself; he'd nothin' to beat at Ascot."

"Jenning knows what he's about," said Pulcher.

Jenning! Before 'Jimmy's' mind passed again that first sight of his horse, and the trainer's smile, as if he—'Jimmy' Shrewin, who owned her—had been dirt. Tyke! To have the mare beaten by one of his! A deep, subtle vexation had oppressed him at times all these last days since George Pulcher had decided in favour of the mare's running a bye. D——n George Pulcher! He took too much on

himself! Thought he had 'Jimmy' Shrewin in his pocket! He looked at the block of crimson opposite. Aunt Sally! If George Pulcher could tell what was passing in his mind!

But driving up to the course he was not above sharing a sandwich and a flask. In fact, his feelings were unstable and gusty—sometimes resentment, sometimes the old respect for his friend's independent bulk. The dignity of ownership takes long to establish itself in those who have been kicked about.

"All right with Docker," murmured Pulcher, sucking at the wicker flask. "I gave him the office at Gatwick."

"She could 'a won," muttered 'Jimmy.'

"Not she, my boy; there's two at least can beat 'er."

Like all oracles, George Pulcher could believe what he wanted to.

Arriving, they entered the grand-stand enclosure, and over the dividing railings 'Jimmy' gazed at the Cheap Ring, already filling-up with its usual customers. Faces, and umbrellas—the same old crowd. How often had he been in that Cheap Ring, with hardly room to move, seeing nothing, hearing nothing but "Two to one on the field!" "Two to one on the field!" "Threes Swordfish!" "Fives Alabaster!" "Two to one on the field!"

Nothing but a sea of men like himself, and a sky overhead. He was not exactly conscious of criticism, only of a dull 'Glad I'm shut of that lot' feeling.

Leaving George Pulcher deep in conversation with a crony, he lighted a cheroot, and slipped out on to the course. He passed the Jockey Club enclosure. Some early 'toffs' were there in twos and threes, exchanging wisdom. He looked at them without envy or malice. He was an owner himself now, almost one of them in a manner of thinking. With a sort of relish he thought of how his past life had circled round those 'toffs,' slippery, shadowlike, kicked about; and now he could get up on the Downs away from 'toffs,' George Pulcher, all that crowd, and smell the grass, and hear the bally larks, and watch his own mare gallop!

They were putting the numbers up for the first race. Queer not to be betting, not to be touting round; queer to be giving it a rest! Utterly familiar with those names on the board, he was utterly unfamiliar with the shapes they stood for.

'I'll go and see 'em come out of the paddock,' he thought, and moved on, skimpy in his bell-shaped coat and billycock with flattened brim. The clamour of the Rings rose behind him while he was entering the paddock.

Very green, very peaceful, there; not many people, yet! Three horses in the second race were being led slowly in a sort of winding ring; and men were clustering round the further gate where the horses would come out. 'Jimmy' joined them, sucking at his cheroot. They were a picture! Damn it! he didn't know but that 'orses laid over men! Pretty creatures!

One by one they passed out of the gate, a round dozen. Selling platers, but pictures for all that!

He turned back towards the horses being led about; and the old instinct to listen took him close to little groups. Talk was all of the big race. From a tall 'toff' he caught the word Calliope.

"Belongs to a bookie, they say."

Bookie! Why not? Wasn't a bookie as good as any other? Ah! and sometimes better than these young snobs with everything to their hand! A bookie—well, what chance had he ever had?

A big brown horse came by.

"That's Deerstalker," he heard the 'toff' say.

'Jimmy' gazed at George Pulcher's fancy with a sort of hostility. Here came another—Wasp, six stone ten, and Deerstalker nine stone—top and bottom of the race!

'My 'orse'd beat either o' them,' he thought stubbornly. 'Don't like that Wasp.'

The distant roar was hushed. They were run-

ning in the first race! He moved back to the gate. The quick clamour rose and dropped, and here they came—back into the paddock, darkened with sweat, flanks heaving a little!

'Jimmy' followed the winner, saw the jockey weigh in.

"What jockey's that?" he asked.

"That? Why, Docker!"

'Jimmy' stared. A short, square, bow-legged figure, with a hardwood face! Waiting his chance, he went up to him and said:

"Docker, you ride my 'orse in the big race."

"Mr. Shrewin?"

"The same," said 'Jimmy.' The jockey's left eyelid drooped a little. Nothing responded in 'Jimmy's' face. "I'll see you before the race," he said.

Again the jockey's eyelid wavered, he nodded and passed on.

'Jimmy' stared at his own boots—they struck him suddenly as too yellow and not at the right angle. But why, he couldn't say.

More horses now—those of the first race being unsaddled, clothed, and led away. More men—three familiar figures: young 'Cocoon' and two others of his Oxford customers.

'Jimmy' turned sharply from them. Stand their airs?—not he! He had a sudden sickish feeling.

With a win, he'd have been a made man—on his own! Blast George Pulcher and his caution! To think of being back in Oxford with those young bloods jeering at his beaten horse! He bit deep into the stump of his cheroot, and suddenly came on Jenning standing by a horse with a star on its bay forehead. The trainer gave him no sign of recognition, but signed to the boy to lead the horse into a stall, and followed, shutting the door. It was exactly as if he had said: 'Vermin about!'

An evil little smile curled 'Jimmy's' lips. The tyke!

The horses for the second race passed out of the paddock gate, and he turned to find his own. His ferreting eyes soon sighted Polman. What the cat-faced fellow knew, or was thinking, 'Jimmy' could not tell. Nobody could tell.

"Where's the mare?" he said.

"Just coming round."

No mistaking her; fine as a star; shiny-coated, sinuous, her blazed face held rather high! Who said she was 'shelly'? She was a picture! He walked a few paces close to the boy.

"That's Calliope. . . . H'm! . . . Nice filly! . . . Looks fit. . . . Who's this James Shrewin? . . . What's she at? . . . I like her looks."

His horse! Not a prettier filly in the world!

He followed Polman into her stall to see her

saddled. In the twilight there he watched her toilet; the rub-over; the exact adjustments; the bottle of water to the mouth; the buckling of the bridle—watched her head high above the boy keeping her steady with gentle pulls of a rein in each hand held out a little wide, and now and then stroking her blazed nose; watched her pretence of nipping at his hand: he watched the beauty of her exaggerated in this half-lit isolation away from the others, the life and litheness in her satin body, the wilful expectancy in her bright soft eyes.

Run a bye! This bit o' blood—this bit o' fire! This horse of his! Deep within that shell of blue box-cloth against the stall partition a thought declared itself: 'I'm —— if she shall! She can beat the lot! And she's —— well going to!'

The door was thrown open, and she led out. He moved alongside. They were staring at her, following her. No wonder! She was a picture, his horse—his! She had gone to 'Jimmy's' head.

They passed Jenning with Diamond Stud waiting to be mounted. 'Jimmy' shot him a look. Let the —— wait!

His mare reached the palings and was halted. 'Jimmy' saw the short square figure of her jockey, in the new magenta cap and jacket—*his* cap, *his* jacket! Beautiful they looked, and no mistake!

"A word with you," he said.

The jockey halted, looked quickly round.

"All right, Mr. Shrewin. No need."

'Jimmy's' eyes smouldered at him; hardly moving his lips, he said, intently: "You —— well don't! You'll —— well ride her to win. Never mind *him!* If you don't, I'll have you off the Turf. Understand me! You'll —— well ride 'er to win."

The jockey's jaw dropped.

"All right, Mr. Shrewin."

"See it is," said 'Jimmy' with a hiss. . . .

"Mount jockeys!"

He saw magenta swing into the saddle. And suddenly, as if smitten with the plague, he scuttled away.

VI

He scuttled to where he could see them going down—seventeen. No need to search for his colours; they blazed, like George Pulcher's countenance, or a rhododendron bush in sunlight, above that bright chestnut with the white nose, curvetting a little as she was led past.

Now they came cantering—Deerstalker in the lead.

"He's a hell of a horse, Deerstalker!" said someone behind.

'Jimmy' cast a nervous glance around. No sign of George Pulcher!

One by one they cantered past, and he watched them with a cold feeling in his stomach. Still unused to sight of the creatures out of which he made his living, they *all* seemed to him hells of horses!

The same voice said:

"New colours! Well, you can see 'em, and the mare too. She's a showy one. Calliope? She's goin' back in the bettin', though."

'Jimmy' moved up through the Ring.

"Four to one on the field!" "Six Deerstalker!" "Sevens Magistrate!" "Ten to one Wasp!" "Ten to one Calliope!" "Four to one Diamond Stud—Four to one on the field!"

Steady as a rock, that horse of Jenning, and his own going back!

"Twelves Calliope!" he heard, just as he reached the stand. The telepathic genius of the Ring missed nothing—almost!

A cold shiver went through him. What had he done by his words to Docker? Spoiled the golden egg laid so carefully? But perhaps she couldn't win even if they let her! He began to mount the stand, his mind in the most acute confusion.

A voice said: "Hullo, Jimmy! Is she going to win?"

One of his young Oxford sparks was jammed against him on the stairway!

He raised his lip in a sort of snarl, and, huddling himself, slipped through and up ahead. He came out and edged in close to the stairs where he could get play for his glasses. Behind him one of those who improve the shining hour among backers cut off from opportunity was intoning the odds a point shorter than below. "Three to one on the field!" "Fives Deerstalker!" "Eight to one Wasp!"

"What price Calliope?" said 'Jimmy' sharply.

"Hundred to eight."

"Done!" Handing him the eight, he took the ticket. Behind him the man's eyes moved fishily, and he resumed his incantation.

"Three to one on the field! . . . Three to one on the field! Six to one Magistrate!"

On the wheeling bunch of colours at the start 'Jimmy' trained his glasses. Something had broken clean away and come half the course—something in yellow.

"Eights Magistrate. Nine to one Magistrate," drifted up.

So they had spotted that! Precious little they didn't spot!

Magistrate was round again, and being ridden back. 'Jimmy' rested his glasses a moment, and looked down. Swarms in the Cheap Ring, Tattersalls, the stands—a crowd so great you could lose George Pulcher in it. Just below a little man

was making silent, frantic signals with his arms to someone across in the Cheap Ring. 'Jimmy' raised his glasses. In line now—magenta third from the rails!

"They're off!" The hush, you could cut it with a knife! Something in green away on the right—Wasp! What a bat they were going! And a sort of numbness in 'Jimmy's' mind cracked suddenly; his glasses shook; his thin, weasley face became suffused and quivered. Magenta—magenta—two from the rails! He could make no story of the race such as he would read in to-morrow's paper—he could see nothing but magenta.

Out of the dip now, and coming fast—green still leading—something in violet, something in tartan, closing.

"Wasp's beat!" "The favourite—the favourite wins!" "Deerstalker—Deerstalker wins! What's that in pink on the rails?"

It was *his* in pink on the rails! Behind him a man went suddenly mad.

"Deerstalker! Come on with 'im, Stee! Deerstalker 'll win—Deerstalker 'll win!"

'Jimmy' sputtered venomously: "Will 'e? Will 'e?"

Deerstalker and his own out from the rest—opposite the Cheap Ring—neck and neck—Docker riding like a demon.

"Deerstalker! Deerstalker!" "Calliope wins! She wins!"

Gawd! His horse! They flashed past—fifty yards to go, and not a head between 'em!

"Deerstalker! Deerstalker!" "Calliope!"

He saw his mare shoot out—she'd won!

With a little queer sound he squirmed and wriggled on to the stairs. No thoughts while he squeezed, and slid, and hurried—only emotion—out of the Ring, away to the paddock. His horse!

Docker had weighed in when he reached the mare. All right! He passed with a grin. 'Jimmy' turned almost into the body of Polman standing like an image.

"Well, Mr. Shrewin," he said to nobody, "she's won."

'Damn you!' thought 'Jimmy.' 'Damn the lot of you!' And he went up to his mare. Quivering, streaked with sweat, impatient of the gathering crowd, she showed the whites of her eyes when he put his hand up to her nose.

"Good girl!" he said, and watched her led away.

'Gawd! I want a drink!' he thought.

Gingerly, keeping a sharp lookout for Pulcher, he returned to the stand to get it, and to draw his hundred. But up there by the stairs the discreet

fellow was no more. On the ticket was the name O. H. Jones, and nothing else. 'Jimmy' Shrewin had been welshed! He went down at last in a bad temper. At the bottom of the staircase stood George Pulcher. The big man's face was crimson, his eyes ominous. He blocked 'Jimmy' into a corner.

"Ah!" he said. "You little crow! What the 'ell made you speak to Docker?"

'Jimmy' grinned. Some new body within him stood there defiant. "She's my 'orse," he said.

"You —— Gawd-forsaken rat! If I 'ad you in a quiet spot, I'd shake the life out of you!"

'Jimmy' stared up, his little spindle legs apart, like a cock-sparrow confronting an offended pigeon.

"Go 'ome," he said, "George Pulcher; and get your mother to mend your socks. You don't know 'ow! Thought I wasn't a man, did you? Well, now you —— well know I am. Keep off my 'orse in future."

Crimson rushed up on crimson in Pulcher's face; he raised his heavy fists. 'Jimmy' stood, unmoving, his little hands in his bell-coat pockets, his withered face upraised. The big man gulped as if swallowing back the tide of blood; his fists edged forward and then—dropped.

"That's better," said 'Jimmy,' "hit one of your own size."

Emitting a deep growl, George Pulcher walked away.

"Two to one on the field—I'll back the field—Two to one on the field." "Threes Snowdrift—Fours Iron Dook."

'Jimmy' stood a moment mechanically listening to the music of his life; then, edging out, he took a fly and was driven to the station.

All the way up to town he sat chewing his cheroot with the glow of drink inside him, thinking of that finish, and of how he had stood up to George Pulcher. For a whole day he was lost in London, but Friday saw him once more at his seat of custom in the 'Corn.' Not having laid against his horse, he had had a good race in spite of everything; yet, the following week, uncertain into what further quagmires of quixotry she might lead him, he sold Calliope.

But for years betting upon horses that he never saw, underground like a rat, yet never again so accessible to the kicks of fortune, or so prone before the shafts of superiority, he would think of the Downs with the blinkin' larks singin', and talk of how once he—had a horse.

1923.

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